

# SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM OF BOLLOBÁS AND HÄGGKVIST ON HAMILTON CYCLES IN REGULAR GRAPHS

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**ABSTRACT.** We prove that, for large  $n$ , every 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq n/4$  is Hamiltonian. This is best possible and verifies the only remaining case of a conjecture posed independently by Bollobás and Häggkvist in the 1970s. The proof builds on a structural decomposition result proved recently by the same authors.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we give an exact solution to a longstanding conjecture on Hamilton cycles in regular graphs, posed independently by Bollobás and Häggkvist: every sufficiently large 3-connected regular graph on  $n$  vertices with degree at least  $n/4$  contains a Hamilton cycle. The history of this problem goes back to Dirac's classical result that  $n/2$  is the minimum degree threshold for Hamiltonicity. This is certainly best possible – consider e.g. the almost balanced complete bipartite graph or the disjoint union of two equally-sized cliques. The following natural question arises: can we reduce the minimum degree condition by making additional assumptions on  $G$ ? The extremal examples above suggest that the family of regular graphs with some connectivity condition might have a lower minimum degree threshold for Hamiltonicity. Indeed, Bollobás [1] as well as Häggkvist (see [7]) independently made the following conjecture: *Every  $t$ -connected  $D$ -regular graph  $G$  on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq n/(t+1)$  is Hamiltonian.* The case  $t = 2$  was first considered by Szekeres (see [7]), and after partial results by several authors including Nash-Williams [14], Erdős and Hobbs [4] and Bollobás and Hobbs [2], it was finally settled in the affirmative by Jackson [7]. His result was extended by Hilbig [6] who showed that one can reduce  $D$  to  $n/3 - 1$  unless  $G$  is the Petersen graph  $P$  or the 3-regular graph  $P'$  obtained by replacing one vertex of  $P$  with a triangle.

However, Jung [9] and independently Jackson, Li and Zhu [8] found a counterexample to the conjecture for  $t \geq 4$ . Until recently, the only remaining case  $t = 3$  was wide open. Fan [5] and Jung [9] independently showed that every 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph contains a cycle of length at least  $3D$ , or a Hamilton cycle. Li and Zhu [13] proved the conjecture for  $t = 3$  in the case when  $D \geq 7n/22$  and Broersma, van den Heuvel, Jackson and Veldman [3] proved it for  $D \geq 2(n+7)/7$ . In [8], Jackson, Li and Zhu prove that if  $G$  satisfies the conditions of the conjecture, any longest cycle  $C$  in  $G$  is dominating provided that  $n$  is not too small. (In other words, the vertices not in  $C$  form an independent set.) Recently, in [10], we proved an approximate version of the conjecture, namely that for all  $\varepsilon > 0$ , whenever  $n$  is sufficiently large, any 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq (1/4 + \varepsilon)n$  is Hamiltonian. Here, we prove the exact version (for large  $n$ ).

**Theorem 1.1.** *There exists  $n_0 \in \mathbb{N}$  such that every 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n \geq n_0$  vertices with  $D \geq n/4$  is Hamiltonian.*

Our proof builds on the results in [10]. In particular, it relies on a structural decomposition result which holds for any dense regular graph: it gives a partition into (bipartite) robust expanders with

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few edges between these (see Section 3 and Theorem 4.4). [10] also contains further applications of this partition result.

There are several natural analogues of these questions for directed and bipartite graphs. For example, the following conjecture of Kühn and Osthus [11] is a directed analogue of Jackson's theorem [7]. Further open problems are discussed in [10]. We say that a digraph  $G$  is  $D$ -regular if every vertex has both in- and out-degree  $D$ .

**Conjecture 1.2.** *Every strongly 2-connected  $D$ -regular digraph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq n/3$  contains a Hamilton cycle.*

This paper is organised as follows. In Section 2, we discuss the extremal examples which show that Theorem 1.1 is best possible. Section 3 contains a sketch of the proof of Theorem 1.1. Section 4 lists some notation, definitions and tools from [10] which will be used throughout the paper. The proof of Theorem 1.1 is split into three cases, and these are considered in Sections 5–7 respectively. Finally, we derive Theorem 1.1 in Section 8.

## 2. THE EXTREMAL EXAMPLES

In this section we show that Theorem 1.1 is best possible in the sense that neither the minimum degree condition nor the connectivity condition can be reduced. The example of Jung [9] and Jackson, Li and Zhu [8] shows that the minimum degree condition cannot be reduced for graphs with  $n \equiv 1 \pmod 8$  vertices; for completeness we extend this to all possible  $n$  in the following proposition. An illustration of their example may be found in Figure 1(i).

**Proposition 2.1.** *Let  $n \geq 5$  and let  $D$  be the largest integer such that  $D \leq \lceil n/4 \rceil - 1$  and  $nD$  is even. Then there is an  $(\lfloor n/8 \rfloor - 1)$ -connected  $D$ -regular graph  $G_n$  on  $n$  vertices which does not contain a Hamilton cycle.*

*Proof.* Recall that a  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices exists if and only if  $n \geq D + 1$  and  $nD$  is even. For each  $n \geq 5$ , we define a graph  $G_n$  on  $n$  vertices as follows. Let  $V_1, V_2, A, B$  be disjoint independent sets where  $|A| = D$ ,  $|B| = D - 1$ , and the other classes have sizes according to the table below. Let  $A_1, A_2$  be a partition of  $A$  so that  $|D/2 - |A_1||$  is minimal subject to the parity conditions below being satisfied:

$n$	$D$	$ V_1 $	$ V_2 $	$ A_1 $	$ A_2 $
$8k + 1$	$2k$	$2k + 1$	$2k + 1$	even	even
$8k + 2$	$2k$	$2k + 2$	$2k + 1$	even	even
$8k + 3$	$2k$	$2k + 2$	$2k + 2$	even	even
$8k + 4$	$2k$	$2k + 3$	$2k + 2$	even	even
$8k + 5$	$2k$	$2k + 3$	$2k + 3$	even	even
$8k + 6$	$2k + 1$	$2k + 3$	$2k + 2$	odd	even
$8k + 7$	$2k$	$2k + 4$	$2k + 4$	even	even
$8k + 8$	$2k + 1$	$2k + 4$	$2k + 3$	even	odd

Note that  $|V_i| \geq D + 1$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Add every edge between  $A$  and  $B$ . First consider the cases when  $D = 2k$ . Then  $|A_i|$  is even for  $i = 1, 2$ . For each  $i = 1, 2$ , add edges so that  $G_n[V_i]$  is  $D$ -regular. Let  $M_i$  be a matching of size  $|A_i|/2$  in  $G_n[V_i]$  and remove it. Let  $V'_i := V(M_i)$ . So  $|V'_i| = |A_i|$ . Add a perfect matching between  $V'_i$  and  $A_i$ .

Now consider the case when  $D = 2k + 1$ . Then, by our choice of  $A_i$  and  $V_i$  we have that  $|A_i| \equiv |V_i| \pmod 2$ . Fix  $V'_i \subseteq V_i$  with  $|V'_i| := |A_i|$ . Define the edge set of  $G_n[V_i]$  so that for all  $x \in V'_i$  we have  $d_{V_i}(x) = D - 1$  and for all  $y \in V_i \setminus V'_i$  we have  $d_{V_i}(y) = D$ . Add a perfect matching between  $V'_i$  and  $A_i$ .

Then  $G_n$  has  $n$  vertices, is  $D$ -regular and has connectivity  $\min\{|A_1|, |A_2|\} \geq \lfloor n/8 \rfloor - 1$ . Moreover,  $G_n$  does not contain a Hamilton cycle because it is not 1-tough ( $G_n \setminus A$  contains more than  $|A|$  components).  $\square$

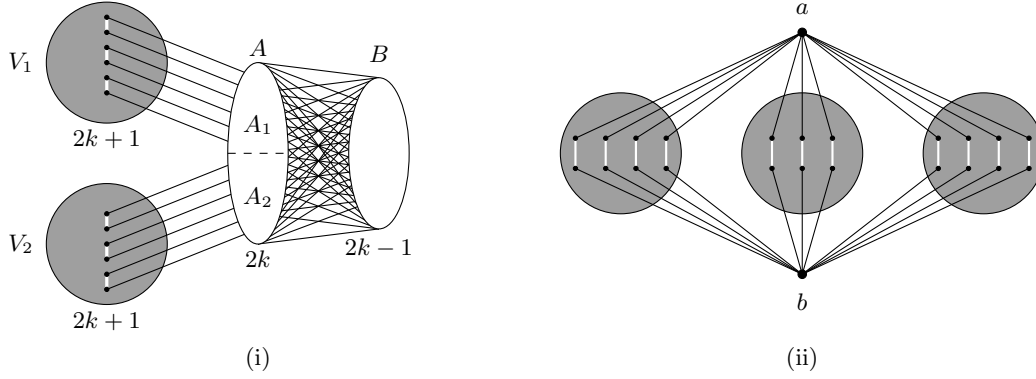


FIGURE 1. Extremal examples for Theorem 1.1.

(i) is an illustration for the case  $n = 8k + 1$ . Here, each  $V_i$  is a clique of order  $2k + 1$  with a matching of size  $k$  removed.

There also exist non-Hamiltonian 2-connected regular graphs on  $n$  vertices with degree close to  $n/3$  (see Figure 1(ii)). Indeed, we can construct such a graph  $G$  as follows. Start with three disjoint cliques on  $3k$  vertices each. In the  $i$ th clique choose disjoint sets  $A_i$  and  $B_i$  with  $|A_i| = |B_i|$  and  $|A_1| = |A_3| = k$  and  $|A_2| = k - 1$ . Remove a perfect matching between  $A_i$  and  $B_i$  for each  $i$ . Add two new vertices  $a$  and  $b$ , where  $a$  is connected to all vertices in the sets  $A_i$  and  $b$  is connected to all vertices in all the sets  $B_i$ . Then  $G$  is a  $(3k - 1)$ -regular 2-connected graph on  $n = 9k + 2$  vertices. However,  $G$  is not Hamiltonian because  $G \setminus \{a, b\}$  has three components. One can construct similar examples for all  $n \in \mathbb{N}$ .

Altogether this shows that none of the conditions — degree or connectivity — of Theorem 1.1 can be relaxed.

### 3. SKETCH OF THE PROOF

**3.1. Robust partitions of dense regular graphs.** The main tool in our proof is a structural result on dense regular graphs that we proved in [10]. Roughly speaking, this allows us to partition the vertex set of such a graph  $G$  into a small number of ‘robust components’, each of which has strong expansion properties and sends few edges to the rest of the graph.

There are two types of robust components: *robust expander components* and *bipartite robust expander components*. A robust expander component  $G[U]$  is characterised by the following properties:

- for each  $S \subseteq U$  which is neither too small nor too large, the ‘robust neighbourhood’  $RN(S)$  of  $S$  is significantly larger than  $S$  itself;
- $G$  contains few edges between  $U$  and  $V(G) \setminus U$ .

Here the robust neighbourhood of  $S$  is the set of all vertices in  $U$  with linearly many neighbours in  $S$ . A bipartite robust expander component  $G[W]$  has slightly more structure:  $G[W]$  can be made into a balanced bipartite graph by removing a small number of vertices and edges, and sets in the first class expand robustly into the second class. More precisely, if  $W$  has bipartition  $A, B$  and  $S \subseteq A$  is neither too large nor too small, then  $RN(S) \cap B$  is significantly larger than  $S$ . (Note that we do not require that sets in both vertex classes expand.)

We say that  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, \dots, V_k, W_1, \dots, W_\ell\}$  is a *robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $k, \ell$*  if it is a partition of  $V(G)$  such that  $G[V_i]$  is a robust expander component for all  $1 \leq i \leq k$  and  $G[W_j]$  is a bipartite robust expander component for all  $1 \leq j \leq \ell$ . In [10] we proved the following:

- ( $\star$ ) For all  $r \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $\varepsilon > 0$  and  $n$  sufficiently large, every  $D$ -regular graph  $G$  on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq (\frac{1}{r+1} + \varepsilon)n$  has a robust partition with parameters  $k, \ell$ , where  $k + 2\ell \leq r$ .

In particular, the number of edges between robust components is  $o(n^2)$  (see Theorem 4.4 for the precise statement).

**3.2. Finding a Hamilton cycle using a robust partition.** Now suppose that  $G$  is a  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq n/4$ , where  $n$  is sufficiently large. Then ( $\star$ ) applied with  $r = 4$  implies that  $G$  has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V}$  with parameters  $k, \ell$ , where  $k + 2\ell \leq 4$ . This gives eight possible structures, parametrised by  $(k, \ell) \in S_{\leq 3} \cup S_4$ , where

$$S_{\leq 3} := \{(1, 0), (2, 0), (3, 0), (0, 1), (1, 1)\} \quad \text{and} \quad S_4 := \{(4, 0), (0, 2), (2, 1)\}.$$

Note that the extremal example in Figure 1(i) corresponds to the case  $(2, 1)$  and the one in (ii) corresponds to the case  $(3, 0)$ . Also note that when  $D \geq (1/4 + \varepsilon)n$ , we have  $k + 2\ell \leq 3$  and so  $(k, \ell) \in S_{\leq 3}$ . In [10], we proved that if  $G$  is 3-connected and has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V}$  with parameters  $k, \ell$  where  $(k, \ell) \in S_{\leq 3}$ , then  $G$  is Hamiltonian. In particular, this implies an approximate version of Theorem 1.1. The proof proceeded by considering each possible structure separately. Therefore, to prove Theorem 1.1, it remains to show that if  $G$  is 3-connected and has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V}$  with parameters  $k, \ell$  where  $(k, \ell) \in S_4$ , then  $G$  is Hamiltonian (see Theorem 4.6). So the current paper does not supersede our previous result but rather uses it as an essential ingredient. Again, we consider each structure separately in Sections 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

In each case we adopt the following strategy. Let  $\mathcal{V}$  be a robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $k, \ell$ . Kühn, Osthus and Treglown [12] proved that every large robust expander  $H$  with linear minimum degree contains a Hamilton cycle. This can be strengthened (see [10]) to show that one can cover all the vertices of a robust expander with a set of paths with prescribed endvertices. More precisely, one can show that each robust expander component  $G[V_i]$  is Hamilton  $p$ -linked for each small  $p$  and all  $1 \leq i \leq k$ . (Here a graph  $H$  is *Hamilton  $p$ -linked* if, whenever  $X := \{x_1, y_1, \dots, x_p, y_p\}$  is a collection of distinct vertices, there exist vertex-disjoint paths  $P_1, \dots, P_p$  such that  $P_j$  connects  $x_j$  to  $y_j$ , and such that together the paths  $P_1, \dots, P_p$  cover all vertices of  $H$ .) Balanced bipartite robust expanders have the same property, provided  $X$  is distributed equally between the bipartition classes. This means that we can hope to reduce the problem of finding a Hamilton cycle in  $G$  to finding a suitable set of *external edges*  $E_{\text{ext}}$ , where an edge is external if it has endpoints in different members of  $\mathcal{V}$ . We then apply the Hamilton  $p$ -linked property to each robust component to join up the external edges into a Hamilton cycle. The assumption of 3-connectivity is crucial for finding  $E_{\text{ext}}$ .

However, several problems arise. When  $(k, \ell) = (4, 0)$ , we have four robust components and only the assumption of 3-connectivity, which makes it difficult to find a suitable set  $E_{\text{ext}}$  joining all four components directly. However, we can appeal to the dominating cycle result in [8] mentioned in the introduction, giving us a fairly short argument for this case. Note that the condition that  $D \geq n/4$  is essential in this case — 3-connectivity on its own is not sufficient.

Now suppose that  $\ell \geq 1$ , i.e.  $\mathcal{V}$  contains a bipartite robust expander component. These cases are challenging since a bipartite graph does not contain a Hamilton cycle if it is not balanced. So as well as a suitable set  $E_{\text{ext}}$ , we need to find a set  $E_{\text{bal}}$  of *balancing edges* incident to the bipartite robust expander component. Suppose for example that  $(k, \ell) = (0, 2)$  and  $G$  consists of two bipartite robust expander components  $W_1, W_2$  such that  $W_i$  has vertex classes  $A_i, B_i$  where  $|A_1| = |B_1|$  and  $|A_2| = |B_2| + 1$ . Then we could choose  $E_{\text{bal}}$  to be a single edge with both endpoints in  $A_2$ . A second example would be  $E_{\text{bal}} = \{a_1 a_2, b_1 a'_2\}$  where  $a_1 \in A_1$ ,  $b_1 \in B_1$  and  $a_2, a'_2 \in A_2$  are distinct. (Note that these are also external edges and in this case we can actually take  $E_{\text{ext}} \cup E_{\text{bal}} = \{a_1 a_2, b_1 a'_2\}$ .) Observe that we need at least  $||A_1| - |B_1|| + ||A_2| - |B_2||$  balancing edges.

Our robust partition guarantees that the vertex classes of any bipartite robust expander component differ by at most  $o(n)$ , so we must potentially find a similar number of balancing edges. This must be done in such a way that  $\mathcal{P} := E_{\text{ext}} \cup E_{\text{bal}}$  can be extended into a Hamilton cycle. So in particular  $\mathcal{P}$  must be a collection of vertex-disjoint paths. We use the Hamilton  $p$ -linkedness of the (bipartite) robust expander components to find these edges which extend  $\mathcal{P}$  into a Hamilton cycle. Consider the second example above, with  $\mathcal{P} = \{a_1a_2, b_1a'_2\}$ . Choose a neighbour  $b_2$  of  $a_2$  in  $B_2$  and let  $\mathcal{P}' := \{a_1a_2b_2, b_1a'_2\}$ . Then the Hamilton 1-linkedness of  $W_1, W_2$  implies that we can find a path  $P_1$  with endpoints  $a_1, b_1$  which spans  $W_1$ , and a path  $P_2$  with endpoints  $a'_2, b_2$  which spans  $W_2 \setminus \{a_2\}$ . Then the edges of  $P_1, P_2, \mathcal{P}'$  together form a Hamilton cycle.

It turns out that the condition that  $D \geq n/4$  is crucial in the case when  $(k, \ell) = (2, 1)$  (see Section 2) but its full strength is not required in the case when  $(k, \ell) = (0, 2)$ . A sketch of the proof in each of the three cases can be found at the beginning of Sections 5, 6 and 7 respectively.

#### 4. NOTATION, DEFINITIONS AND GENERAL TOOLS

**4.1. General notation.** Given a graph  $G$  and  $X \subseteq V(G)$ , complements are always taken within  $G$ , so that  $\overline{X} := V(G) \setminus X$ . We write  $G \setminus X$  to mean  $G[V(G) \setminus X]$ . Given  $H \subseteq V(G)$ , we write  $G \setminus E(H)$  for the graph with vertex set  $V(G)$  and edge set  $E(G) \setminus E(H)$ . We write  $N(X) := \bigcup_{x \in X} N(x)$ . Given  $x \in V(G)$  and  $Y \subseteq V(G)$  we write  $d_Y(x)$  for the number of edges  $xy$  with  $y \in Y$ .

If  $S, T$  are sets of vertices which are not necessarily disjoint and may not be subsets of  $V(G)$ , we write  $e_G(S)$  for the number of edges of  $G$  with both endpoints in  $S$ , and  $e_G(S, T)$  for the number of  $ST$ -edges of  $G$ , i.e. for the number of all edges with one endpoint in  $S$  and the other endpoint in  $T$ . Moreover, we set  $G[S] := G[S \cap V(G)]$  and write  $G[S, T]$  for the bipartite graph with vertex classes  $S \cap V(G), T \cap V(G)$  whose edge set consists of all the  $ST$ -edges of  $G$ . We omit the subscript  $G$  whenever the graph  $G$  is clear from the context.

Given disjoint subsets  $X, Y$  of  $V(G)$ , we say that  $P$  is an  $XY$ -path if  $P$  has one endpoint in  $X$  and one endpoint in  $Y$ . We call a vertex-disjoint collection of non-trivial paths a *path system*. We will often think of a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  as a graph with edge set  $\bigcup_{P \in \mathcal{P}} E(P)$ , so that e.g.  $V(\mathcal{P})$  is the union of the vertex sets of each path in  $\mathcal{P}$ , and  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(X)$  denotes the number of edges on the paths in  $\mathcal{P}$  having both endpoints in  $X$ . By slightly abusing notation, given two vertex sets  $S$  and  $T$  and a path system  $\mathcal{P}$ , we write  $\mathcal{P}[S]$  for the graph obtained from  $\mathcal{P}[S]$  by deleting isolated vertices and define  $\mathcal{P}[S, T]$  similarly. We say that a vertex  $x$  is an *endpoint* of  $\mathcal{P}$  if  $x$  is an endpoint of some path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . An *Euler tour* in a (multi)graph is a closed walk that uses each edge exactly once.

We write  $\mathbb{N}$  for the set of positive integers and write  $\mathbb{N}_0 := \mathbb{N} \cup \{0\}$ .  $\mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$  denotes the set of non-negative reals. Throughout we will omit floors and ceilings where the argument is unaffected. The constants in the hierarchies used to state our results are chosen from right to left. For example, if we claim that a result holds whenever  $0 < 1/n \ll a \ll b \ll c \leq 1$  (where  $n$  is the order of the graph), then there is a non-decreasing function  $f : (0, 1] \rightarrow (0, 1]$  such that the result holds for all  $0 < a, b, c \leq 1$  and all  $n \in \mathbb{N}$  with  $b \leq f(c)$ ,  $a \leq f(b)$  and  $1/n \leq f(a)$ . Hierarchies with more constants are defined in a similar way. Given  $0 < \varepsilon < 1$  and  $x \in \mathbb{R}$ , we write  $\lceil x \rceil_{\varepsilon} := \lceil x - \varepsilon \rceil$ .

**4.2. Robust partitions of regular graphs.** In this section we list the definitions which are required to state the structural result on dense regular graphs (Theorem 4.4) which is the main tool in our proof. As already indicated in Section 3, this involves the concept of ‘robust expansion’.

Given a graph  $G$  on  $n$  vertices,  $0 < \nu < 1$  and  $S \subseteq V(G)$ , we define the  $\nu$ -robust neighbourhood  $RN_{\nu, G}(S)$  of  $S$  to be the set of all those vertices with at least  $\nu n$  neighbours in  $S$ . Given  $0 < \nu \leq \tau < 1$ , we say that  $G$  is a *robust  $(\nu, \tau)$ -expander* if, for all sets  $S$  of vertices satisfying  $\tau n \leq |S| \leq (1 - \tau)n$ , we have that  $|RN_{\nu, G}(S)| \geq |S| + \nu n$ . For  $S \subseteq X \subseteq V(G)$  we write  $RN_{\nu, X}(S) := RN_{\nu, G[X]}(S)$ .

The next lemma (Lemma 4.8 in [10]) states that robust expanders are indeed robust, in the sense that the expansion property cannot be destroyed by adding or removing a small number of vertices.

**Lemma 4.1.** *Let  $0 < \nu \ll \tau \ll 1$ . Suppose that  $G$  is a graph and  $U, U' \subseteq V(G)$  are such that  $G[U]$  is a robust  $(\nu, \tau)$ -expander and  $|U \triangle U'| \leq \nu|U|/2$ . Then  $G[U']$  is a robust  $(\nu/2, 2\tau)$ -expander.*

We now introduce the concept of ‘bipartite robust expansion’. Let  $0 < \nu \leq \tau < 1$ . Suppose that  $H$  is a (not necessarily bipartite) graph on  $n$  vertices and that  $A, B$  is a partition of  $V(H)$ . We say that  $H$  is a *bipartite robust  $(\nu, \tau)$ -expander with bipartition  $A, B$*  if every  $S \subseteq A$  with  $\tau|A| \leq |S| \leq (1 - \tau)|A|$  satisfies  $|RN_{\nu, H}(S) \cap B| \geq |S| + \nu n$ . Note that the order of  $A$  and  $B$  matters here. We do not mention the bipartition if it is clear from the context.

Note that for  $0 < \nu' \leq \nu \leq \tau \leq \tau' < 1$ , any robust  $(\nu, \tau)$ -expander is also a robust  $(\nu', \tau')$ -expander (and the analogue holds in the bipartite case).

Given  $0 < \rho < 1$ , we say that  $U \subseteq V(G)$  is a  $\rho$ -component of a graph  $G$  on  $n$  vertices if  $|U| \geq \sqrt{\rho}n$  and  $e(U, \overline{U}) \leq \rho n^2$ . We will need the following simple observation (Lemma 4.1 in [10]) about  $\rho$ -components.

**Lemma 4.2.** *Let  $n, D \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $\rho > 0$ . Let  $G$  be a  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices and let  $U$  be a  $\rho$ -component of  $G$ . Then  $|U| \geq D - \sqrt{\rho}n$ .*

Suppose that  $G$  is a graph on  $n$  vertices and that  $U \subseteq V(G)$ . We say that  $G[U]$  is  $\rho$ -close to bipartite (with bipartition  $U_1, U_2$ ) if

- (C1)  $U$  is the union of two disjoint sets  $U_1$  and  $U_2$  with  $|U_1|, |U_2| \geq \sqrt{\rho}n$ ;
- (C2)  $||U_1| - |U_2|| \leq \rho n$ ;
- (C3)  $e(U_1, \overline{U_1}) + e(U_2, \overline{U_2}) \leq \rho n^2$ .

(Recall that  $\overline{U_1} = V(G) \setminus U_1$  and similarly for  $U_2$ .) Note that (C1) and (C3) together imply that  $U$  is a  $\rho$ -component. Suppose that  $G$  is a graph on  $n$  vertices and that  $U \subseteq V(G)$ . Let  $0 < \rho \leq \nu \leq \tau < 1$ . We say that  $G[U]$  is a  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component of  $G$  if

- (E1)  $U$  is a  $\rho$ -component;
- (E2)  $G[U]$  is a robust  $(\nu, \tau)$ -expander.

We say that  $G[U]$  is a *bipartite  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component (with bipartition  $A, B$ )* of  $G$  if

- (B1)  $G[U]$  is  $\rho$ -close to bipartite with bipartition  $A, B$ ;
- (B2)  $G[U]$  is a bipartite robust  $(\nu, \tau)$ -expander with bipartition  $A, B$ .

We say that  $U$  is a  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust component if it is either a  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component or a bipartite  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component.

One can show that, after adding and removing a small number of vertices, a bipartite robust expander component is still a bipartite robust expander component, with slightly weaker parameters. This appears as Lemma 4.10 in [10] and the proof may be found in [15].

**Lemma 4.3.** *Let  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \leq \gamma \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll \alpha < 1$  and suppose that  $G$  is a  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices where  $D \geq \alpha n$ . Suppose that  $G[A \cup B]$  is a bipartite  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component of  $G$  with bipartition  $A, B$ . Let  $A', B' \subseteq V(G)$  be such that  $|A \triangle A'| + |B \triangle B'| \leq \gamma n$ . Then  $G[A' \cup B']$  is a bipartite  $(3\gamma, \nu/2, 2\tau)$ -robust expander component of  $G$  with bipartition  $A', B'$ .*

Let  $k, \ell, D \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and  $0 < \rho \leq \nu \leq \tau < 1$ . Given a  $D$ -regular graph  $G$  on  $n$  vertices, we say that  $\mathcal{V}$  is a *robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, k, \ell$*  if the following conditions hold.

- (D1)  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, \dots, V_k, W_1, \dots, W_\ell\}$  is a partition of  $V(G)$ ;
- (D2) for all  $1 \leq i \leq k$ ,  $G[V_i]$  is a  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component of  $G$ ;
- (D3) for all  $1 \leq j \leq \ell$ , there exists a partition  $A_j, B_j$  of  $W_j$  such that  $G[W_j]$  is a bipartite  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component with bipartition  $A_j, B_j$ ;
- (D4) for all  $X, X' \in \mathcal{V}$  and all  $x \in X$ , we have  $d_X(x) \geq d_{X'}(x)$ . In particular,  $d_X(x) \geq D/m$ , where  $m := k + \ell$ ;

- (D5) for all  $1 \leq j \leq \ell$  we have  $d_{B_j}(u) \geq d_{A_j}(u)$  for all  $u \in A_j$  and  $d_{A_j}(v) \geq d_{B_j}(v)$  for all  $v \in B_j$ ; in particular,  $\delta(G[A_j, B_j]) \geq D/2m$ ;
- (D6)  $k + 2\ell \leq \lfloor (1 + \rho^{1/3})n/D \rfloor$ ;
- (D7) for all  $X \in \mathcal{V}$ , all but at most  $\rho n$  vertices  $x \in X$  satisfy  $d_X(x) \geq D - \rho n$ .

Note that (D7) implies that  $|X| \geq D - \rho n$  for all  $X \in \mathcal{V}$ .

The following structural result (Theorem 3.1 in [10]) is our main tool. It states that any dense regular graph has a remarkably simple structure: a partition into a small number of (bipartite) robust expander components.

**Theorem 4.4.** *For all  $\alpha, \tau > 0$  and every non-decreasing function  $f : (0, 1) \rightarrow (0, 1)$ , there exists  $n_0 \in \mathbb{N}$  such that the following holds. For all  $D$ -regular graphs  $G$  on  $n \geq n_0$  vertices where  $D \geq \alpha n$ , there exist  $\rho, \nu$  with  $1/n_0 \leq \rho \leq \nu \leq \tau$ ;  $\rho \leq f(\nu)$  and  $1/n_0 \leq f(\rho)$ , and  $k, \ell \in \mathbb{N}$  such that  $G$  has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, k, \ell$ .*

Let  $k, \ell \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and  $0 < \rho \leq \nu \leq \tau \leq \eta < 1$ . Given a graph  $G$  on  $n$  vertices, we say that  $\mathcal{U}$  is a *weak robust partition* of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, \eta, k, \ell$  if the following conditions hold.

- (D1')  $\mathcal{U} = \{U_1, \dots, U_k, Z_1, \dots, Z_\ell\}$  is a partition of  $V(G)$ ;
- (D2') for all  $1 \leq i \leq k$ ,  $G[U_i]$  is a  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component of  $G$ ;
- (D3') for all  $1 \leq j \leq \ell$ , there exists a partition  $A_j, B_j$  of  $Z_j$  such that  $G[Z_j]$  is a bipartite  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component with bipartition  $A_j, B_j$ ;
- (D4')  $\delta(G[X]) \geq \eta n$  for all  $X \in \mathcal{U}$ ;
- (D5') for all  $1 \leq j \leq \ell$ , we have  $\delta(G[A_j, B_j]) \geq \eta n/2$ .

Using Lemma 4.2 it is easy to check that whenever  $\rho \leq \rho' \leq \nu$  and  $G$  is a  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq 5\sqrt{\rho'}n$ , then any weak robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, \eta, k, \ell$  is also a weak robust partition with parameters  $\rho', \nu, \tau, \eta, k, \ell$ . A similar statement holds for robust partitions.

A weak robust partition  $\mathcal{U}$  is weaker than a robust partition in the sense that the graph is not necessarily regular, and we can make small adjustments to the partition while still maintaining (D1')–(D5') with slightly worse parameters. It is not hard to show the following (Proposition 5.1 in [10]).

**Proposition 4.5.** *Let  $k, \ell, D \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and suppose that  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \leq \nu \leq \tau \leq \eta \leq \alpha^2/2 < 1$ . Suppose that  $G$  is a  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices where  $D \geq \alpha n$ . Let  $\mathcal{V}$  be a robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, k, \ell$ . Then  $\mathcal{V}$  is a weak robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, \eta, k, \ell$ .*

We also proved the following stability result (Theorem 6.11 in [10]). This implies that any sufficiently large 3-connected regular graph  $G$  on  $n$  vertices with degree at least a little larger than  $n/5$  is either Hamiltonian, or has one of three very specific structures.

**Theorem 4.6.** *For every  $\varepsilon, \tau > 0$  with  $2\tau^{1/3} \leq \varepsilon$  and every non-decreasing function  $g : (0, 1) \rightarrow (0, 1)$ , there exists  $n_0 \in \mathbb{N}$  such that the following holds. For all 3-connected  $D$ -regular graphs  $G$  on  $n \geq n_0$  vertices where  $D \geq (1/5 + \varepsilon)n$ , at least one of the following holds:*

- (i)  $G$  has a Hamilton cycle;
- (ii)  $D < (1/4 + \varepsilon)n$  and there exist  $\rho, \nu$  with  $1/n_0 \leq \rho \leq \nu \leq \tau$ ;  $1/n_0 \leq g(\rho)$ ;  $\rho \leq g(\nu)$ , and  $(k, \ell) \in \{(4, 0), (2, 1), (0, 2)\}$  such that  $G$  has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, k, \ell$ .

**4.3. Path systems and  $\mathcal{V}$ -tours.** Here we state some useful tools concerning path systems that we will need in our proof. All of these were proved in [10].

A simple double-counting argument gives the following proposition (Proposition 6.4 in [10]). We use it to guarantee the existence of edges in certain parts within a regular graph.

**Proposition 4.7.** *Let  $G$  be a  $D$ -regular graph with vertex partition  $A, B, U$ . Then*

$$(i) \quad 2(e(A) - e(B)) + e(A, U) - e(B, U) = (|A| - |B|)D.$$

In particular,

$$(ii) \quad 2e(A) + e(A, U) \geq (|A| - |B|)D.$$

Suppose that  $G$  is a graph containing a path system  $\mathcal{P}$ , and that  $\mathcal{V}$  is a partition of  $V(G)$ . We define the *reduced multigraph*  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  of  $\mathcal{P}$  with respect to  $\mathcal{V}$  to be the multigraph with vertex set  $\mathcal{V}$  in which we add a distinct edge between  $X, X' \in \mathcal{V}$  for every path in  $\mathcal{P}$  with one endpoint in  $X$  and one endpoint in  $X'$ . So  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  might contain loops and multiple edges.

Given a graph  $G$  containing a path system  $\mathcal{P}$ , and  $A \subseteq V(G)$ , we write

$$(4.1) \quad F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) := (a_1, a_2)$$

when  $a_i$  is the number of vertices in  $A$  of degree  $i$  in  $\mathcal{P}$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Note that, if  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = 0$ , then

$$(4.2) \quad e_{\mathcal{P}}(A, \overline{A}) = a_1 + 2a_2.$$

The following lemma (Lemma 6.3 in [10]) is used in the case  $(k, \ell) = (4, 0)$ . An extension (Proposition 7.15) is used in the case  $(k, \ell) = (2, 1)$ .

**Lemma 4.8.** *Let  $G$  be a 3-connected graph and let  $\mathcal{V}$  be a partition of  $V(G)$  into at most three parts, where  $|V| \geq 3$  for each  $V \in \mathcal{V}$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that*

- (i)  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq 4$  and  $\mathcal{P} \subseteq \bigcup_{V \in \mathcal{V}} G[V, \overline{V}]$ ;
- (ii)  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  has an Euler tour;
- (iii) for each  $V \in \mathcal{V}$ , if  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(V) = (c_1, c_2)$ , then  $c_1 + 2c_2 \in \{2, 4\}$  and  $c_2 \leq 1$ .

Let  $k, \ell \in \mathbb{N}_0$ , let  $0 < \rho \leq \nu \leq \tau \leq \eta < 1$  and let  $0 < \gamma < 1$ . Suppose that  $G$  is a graph on  $n$  vertices with a weak robust partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, \dots, V_k, W_1, \dots, W_{\ell}\}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, \eta, k, \ell$ , so that the bipartition of  $W_j$  specified by (D3') is  $A_j, B_j$ . We say that a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  is a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour with parameter  $\gamma$  if

- $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  has an Euler tour;
- for all  $X \in \mathcal{V}$  we have  $|V(\mathcal{P}) \cap X| \leq \gamma n$ ;
- for all  $1 \leq j \leq \ell$  we have  $|A_j \setminus V(\mathcal{P})| = |B_j \setminus V(\mathcal{P})|$ . Moreover,  $A_j, B_j$  contain the same number of endpoints of  $\mathcal{P}$  and this number is positive.

We will often think of  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  as a walk rather than a multigraph. So in particular, we will often say that ' $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour'.

We will use the following lemma (a special case of Lemma 6.8 in [10]) to extend a path system into one that satisfies the third property above for all  $A, B$  forming a bipartite robust expander component.

**Lemma 4.9.** *Let  $n, k, \ell \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll \eta < 1$ . Let  $G$  be a graph on  $n$  vertices and suppose that  $\mathcal{V} := \{V_1, \dots, V_k, W_1, \dots, W_{\ell}\}$  is a weak robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, \eta, k, \ell$ . For each  $1 \leq j \leq \ell$ , let  $A_j, B_j$  be the bipartition of  $W_j$  specified by (D3'). Let  $\mathcal{P}$  be a path system such that for each  $1 \leq j \leq \ell$ ,*

$$(4.3) \quad 2e_{\mathcal{P}}(A_j) - 2e_{\mathcal{P}}(B_j) + e_{\mathcal{P}}(A_j, \overline{W_j}) - e_{\mathcal{P}}(B_j, \overline{W_j}) = 2(|A_j| - |B_j|).$$

*Suppose further that  $|V(\mathcal{P}) \cap X| \leq \rho n$  for all  $X \in \mathcal{V}$ , and that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour. Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  that is a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour with parameter  $9\rho$ .*

The last result of this section (a special case of Lemma 5.2 in [10]) says that, in order to find a Hamilton cycle, it is sufficient to find a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour.

**Lemma 4.10.** *Let  $k, \ell, n \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and suppose that  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho, \gamma \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll \eta < 1$ . Suppose that  $G$  is a graph on  $n$  vertices and that  $\mathcal{V}$  is a weak robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, \eta, k, \ell$ . Suppose further that  $G$  contains a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour  $\mathcal{P}$  with parameter  $\gamma$ . Then  $G$  contains a Hamilton cycle.*



## 5. (4,0): FOUR ROBUST EXPANDER COMPONENTS

The aim of this section is to prove the following lemma.

**Lemma 5.1.** *Let  $D, n \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll 1$ . Suppose that  $G$  is a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq n/4$ . Suppose further that  $G$  has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, 4, 0$ . Then  $G$  contains a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour with parameter  $33/n$ .*

We will find a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour  $\mathcal{P}$  as follows. Let  $\mathcal{V} := \{V_1, \dots, V_4\}$ . Suppose that there are  $1 \leq i < j \leq 4$  such that  $G[V_i, V_j]$  contains a large matching  $M$ . We can use 3-connectivity with the tripartition  $\mathcal{V}' := \mathcal{V} \cup \{V_i \cup V_j\} \setminus \{V_i, V_j\}$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{V}'}(\mathcal{P}')$  is a  $\mathcal{V}'$ -tour. Then  $\mathcal{P}'$  together with some suitable edges of  $M$  will form a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour.

Suppose instead that for all  $1 \leq i < j \leq 4$ , every matching in  $G[V_i, V_j]$  is small. In this case, we appeal to the result of Jackson, Li and Zhu [8] mentioned in the introduction: any longest cycle in  $G$  is dominating. Thus  $C$  visits all the  $V_i$ . Moreover, since there are very few edges between the  $V_i$  it follows that most of the edges of  $C$  lie within some  $V_i$ . If we remove all such edges, what remains is a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour.

Let  $\mathcal{V}'$  be a partition of  $V(G)$  into three parts such that  $\mathcal{V}$  is a refinement of  $\mathcal{V}'$ . Then, by Lemma 4.8, we can easily find a collection of paths  $\mathcal{P}'$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{V}'}(\mathcal{P}')$  is an Euler tour. The following result will enable us to ‘extend’  $\mathcal{P}'$  into  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour.

**Proposition 5.2.** *Let  $\mathcal{U}$  be a partition of  $V(G)$ . Let  $U, V \in \mathcal{U}$  and let  $\mathcal{U}' := \mathcal{U} \cup \{U \cup V\} \setminus \{U, V\}$ . Suppose that  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{U}'}(\mathcal{P}')$  is an Euler tour. Suppose further that  $G[U, V]$  contains a matching  $M$  of size at least  $|V(\mathcal{P}') \cap (U \cup V)| + 2$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  with  $E(\mathcal{P}) \supseteq E(\mathcal{P}')$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{U}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour and  $|V(\mathcal{P}) \cap X| \leq |V(\mathcal{P}') \cap X| + 2$  for all  $X \in \mathcal{U}$ .*

*Proof.* Note that there are at least two edges  $e, e'$  of  $M$  which are vertex-disjoint from  $\mathcal{P}'$ . Let  $R' := R_{\mathcal{U}}(\mathcal{P}')$  and  $R'' := R_{\mathcal{U}'}(\mathcal{P}')$ . We have that  $d_{R'}(U) + d_{R'}(V) = d_{R''}(U \cup V)$  is even since  $R''$  is an Euler tour. Moreover,  $d_{R'}(X) = d_{R''}(X)$  for all  $X \in \mathcal{U}' \cap \mathcal{U}$ .

If both  $d_{R'}(U)$  and  $d_{R'}(V)$  are odd, let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}' \cup \{e\}$ . Otherwise, both  $d_{R'}(U)$  and  $d_{R'}(V)$  are even (but one could be zero). In this case, let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}' \cup \{e, e'\}$ . It is straightforward to check that in both cases  $R_{\mathcal{U}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour.  $\square$

A subgraph  $H$  of a graph  $G$  is said to be *dominating* if  $G \setminus V(H)$  is an independent set. In our proof of Lemma 5.1 we will use the following theorem of Jackson, Li and Zhu.

**Theorem 5.3.** [8] *Let  $G$  be a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq n/4$ . Then any longest cycle in  $G$  is dominating.*

*Proof of Lemma 5.1.* Let  $C$  be a longest cycle in  $G$ . Then Theorem 5.3 implies that  $C$  is dominating. We consider two cases according to the number of edges in  $C$  between classes of  $\mathcal{V}$ .

**Case 1.**  $e_C(U, V) \geq 12$  for some distinct  $U, V \in \mathcal{V}$ .

Since  $C$  is a cycle we have that  $\Delta(C[U, V]) \leq 2$ . König’s theorem implies that  $C[U, V]$  has a proper edge-colouring with at most two colours, and thus  $C[U, V]$  contains a matching of size at least  $e_C(U, V)/2 \geq 6$ .

Let  $\mathcal{V}' := \mathcal{V} \cup \{U \cup V\} \setminus \{U, V\}$ . So  $\mathcal{V}'$  is a tripartition of  $V(G)$ , and certainly  $|V| \geq 3$  for each  $V \in \mathcal{V}'$ . Apply Lemma 4.8 to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  in  $G$  such that (i)–(iii) hold. Then  $R_{\mathcal{V}'}(\mathcal{P}')$  is an Euler tour and (iii) implies that  $|V(\mathcal{P}') \cap X| \leq 4$  for all  $X \in \mathcal{V}'$ .

Now Proposition 5.2 with  $\mathcal{V}, \mathcal{V}'$  playing the roles of  $\mathcal{U}, \mathcal{U}'$  implies that  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour, and  $|V(\mathcal{P}) \cap X| \leq 6$  for all  $X \in \mathcal{V}$ . So  $\mathcal{P}$  is a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour with  $6/n$  playing the role of  $\gamma$ .

**Case 2.**  $e_C(U, V) \leq 11$  for all distinct  $U, V \in \mathcal{V}$ .

Let  $\mathcal{P}$  be the collection of disjoint paths with edge set  $E(C) \setminus \bigcup_{V \in \mathcal{V}} E(C[V])$ . For each  $V \in \mathcal{V}$ , let  $\mathcal{P}_V := \bigcup_{U \in \mathcal{V} \setminus \{V\}} \mathcal{P}[U, V]$ . Then

$$(5.1) \quad e(\mathcal{P}_V) = \sum_{U \in \mathcal{V} \setminus \{V\}} e_C(U, V) \leq 33.$$

Suppose that  $|V(C) \cap V| < D - 2\rho^{1/3}n$ . Let  $X := V \setminus V(C)$ . So  $X$  is an independent set in  $G$ . Moreover, (D7) implies that, for all but at most  $\rho n$  vertices in  $x \in V$ , we have  $d_V(x) \geq D - \rho n$ . In particular,  $|V| \geq D - \rho n$  and so  $|X| \geq \rho^{1/3}n$ . Thus there is some  $x \in X$  such that  $d_V(x) \geq D - \rho n$ . Therefore  $x$  has a neighbour in  $X$ , a contradiction.

Thus  $|V(C) \cap V| \geq D - 2\rho^{1/3}n$  for all  $V \in \mathcal{V}$ . But

$$2|V(C) \cap V| = \sum_{v \in V} d_C(v) = 2e_C(V) + e(\mathcal{P}_V)$$

and hence

$$e_C(V) = |V(C) \cap V| - \frac{1}{2}e(\mathcal{P}_V) \geq D - 2\rho^{1/3}n - 33/2 > 0.$$

Thus  $E(C[V]) \neq \emptyset$  for all  $V \in \mathcal{V}$ . It is straightforward to check that this implies that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour. Finally, note that, for each  $V \in \mathcal{V}$ , (5.1) implies that we have  $|V(\mathcal{P}) \cap V| \leq e(\mathcal{P}_V) \leq 33$ . So  $\mathcal{P}$  is a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour with parameter  $33/n$ .  $\square$

## 6. (0,2): TWO BIPARTITE ROBUST EXPANDER COMPONENTS

The aim of this section is to prove the following lemma.

**Lemma 6.1.** *Let  $D, n \in \mathbb{N}$ , let  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll \alpha < 1$  and let  $D \geq \alpha n$ . Suppose that  $G$  is a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices and that  $\mathcal{V}$  is a robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, 0, 2$ . Then  $G$  contains a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour with parameter  $\rho^{1/3}$ .*

We first give a brief outline of the argument.

**6.1. Sketch of the proof of Lemma 6.1.** Let  $\mathcal{V} := \{W_1, W_2\}$  be as above and let  $A_i, B_i$  be a bipartition of  $W_i$  such that  $G[W_i]$  is a bipartite robust expander component with bipartition  $A_i, B_i$ , where  $|A_i| \geq |B_i|$ . To prove Lemma 6.1, our aim is to find a ‘balancing’ path system  $\mathcal{P}$  to which we can apply Lemma 4.9 and hence obtain a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour. In other words, the path system has to ‘compensate for’ the differences in the sizes of the vertex classes  $A_i$  and  $B_i$  and has to ‘join up’  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ .

The naïve approach of first balancing  $G[W_1]$ , and then  $G[W_2]$ , can lead to difficulties. Suppose, for example, that  $|A_1| = |B_1|$ ,  $|A_2| = |B_2| + 1$  and  $e_G(A_2) = 0$ . Then  $G[W_1]$  is balanced, but in order to balance  $G[W_2]$ , we need to add edges so that exactly two endpoints lie in  $A_2$ . Since  $e_G(A_2) = 0$ , we need to add two edges in  $E(G[A_2, W_1])$ . But the addition of any such edges might unbalance  $G[W_1]$  and we would have to find further edges to rectify this; and these could in turn destroy the balancedness of  $G[W_2]$ .

Therefore  $G[W_1]$  and  $G[W_2]$  must be balanced simultaneously. Our  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour  $\mathcal{P}$  will consist of a union of a small number of matchings. We will restrict the number of these matchings and their locations, otherwise they might interfere with each other (e.g. their union might contain cycles, in which case they certainly will not form a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour). The  $D$ -regularity of  $G$  will enable us to restrict the location of our matchings. More precisely, we will be able to find them in  $G[C_1] \cup G[C_2] \cup G[W_1, A_2]$ , where  $C_i \in \{A_i, B_i\}$ . We begin by choosing a matching  $M \in G[W_1, A_2]$  which has a suitable number of edges in both  $G[A_1, A_2]$  and  $G[B_1, A_2]$ . Then we find matchings  $M_i$  in  $G[C_i]$  which have the correct size and which interact with  $M$  in a suitable way. To do this, we first consider vertices in  $C_i$  with low degree in  $G[C_i]$ , and then those with high degree. If  $e(M) < 2$  we must appeal to 3-connectivity to find suitable external connecting edges (i.e. those connecting  $W_1$  to  $W_2$ ).

**6.2. Balanced subgraphs with respect to a partition.** Consider a graph  $G$  with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} := \{W_1, W_2\}$ , where  $W_i$  has bipartition  $A_i, B_i$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Write  $\mathcal{V}^*$  for the ordered partition  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$ . Given  $D \in \mathbb{N}$ , we say that  $G$  is  $D$ -balanced (with respect to  $\mathcal{V}^*$ ) if both of the following hold.

$$(6.1) \quad \begin{aligned} 2e(A_1) - 2e(B_1) + e(A_1, W_2) - e(B_1, W_2) &= D(|A_1| - |B_1|); \\ 2e(A_2) - 2e(B_2) + e(A_2, W_1) - e(B_2, W_1) &= D(|A_2| - |B_2|). \end{aligned}$$

Proposition 4.7(i) easily implies that any  $D$ -regular graph with arbitrary ordered partition  $\mathcal{V}^*$  is  $D$ -balanced.

**Proposition 6.2.** *Suppose that  $G$  is a  $D$ -regular graph and let  $A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2$  be a partition of  $V(G)$ . Then  $G$  is  $D$ -balanced with respect to  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$ .*

The next proposition shows that, to prove Lemma 6.1, it suffices to find a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  which is 2-balanced with respect to  $\mathcal{V}^*$ , contains a  $W_1W_2$ -path, and does not have many edges.

**Proposition 6.3.** *Let  $n, D \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \leq \gamma \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll \alpha < 1$ . Let  $G$  be a  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq \alpha n$ . Suppose further that  $G$  has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V} := \{W_1, W_2\}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, 0, 2$ . For each  $i = 1, 2$ , let  $A_i, B_i$  be the bipartition of  $W_i$  guaranteed by (D3). Let  $\mathcal{P}$  be a 2-balanced path system with respect to  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$  in  $G$ . Suppose that  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \gamma n$  and that  $\mathcal{P}$  contains at least one  $W_1W_2$ -path. Then  $G$  contains a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour with parameter  $18\gamma$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $p$  be the number of  $W_1W_2$ -paths in  $\mathcal{P}$ . Any  $W_1W_2$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$  contains an odd number of  $W_1W_2$ -edges. Since  $\mathcal{P}$  is 2-balanced with respect to  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$ , we have that  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(W_1, W_2) = e_{\mathcal{P}}(A_1, W_2) - e_{\mathcal{P}}(B_1, W_2) + 2e_{\mathcal{P}}(B_1, W_2)$  is even. Hence  $p$  is even. Since  $p > 0$ , we have that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour.

The hypothesis  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \gamma n$  implies that  $|V(\mathcal{P}) \cap V| \leq 2\gamma n$  for all  $V \in \mathcal{V}$ . Proposition 4.5 implies that  $\mathcal{V}$  is a weak robust partition with parameters  $2\gamma, \nu, \tau, \alpha^2/2, 0, 2$ . Thus we can apply Lemma 4.9 with  $\mathcal{V}, 0, 2, W_j, A_j, B_j, \mathcal{P}, 2\gamma$  playing the roles of  $\mathcal{U}, k, \ell, W_j, A_j, B_j, \mathcal{P}, \rho$  to find a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour  $\mathcal{P}'$  with parameter  $18\gamma$ .  $\square$

The next lemma shows that we can find a  $D$ -balanced subgraph of  $G$  which only contains edges in some of the parts of  $G$ . (Recall the definition of  $\lceil \cdot \rceil_{\varepsilon}$  from the end of Subsection 4.1.)

**Lemma 6.4.** *Let  $D \in \mathbb{N}$  be such that  $D \geq 20$ . Let  $G$  be a graph and let  $\mathcal{V}^* := (A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$  be an ordered partition of  $V(G)$  with  $0 \leq |A_i| - |B_i| \leq D/2$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Suppose that  $e_G(A_1, B_2) \leq e_G(B_1, A_2)$  and  $\Delta(G[A_i]) \leq D/2$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Suppose further that  $G$  is  $D$ -balanced with respect to  $\mathcal{V}^*$ . Then one of the following holds:*

- (i) *for  $i = 1, 2$ ,  $G[A_i]$  contains a matching  $M_i$  of size  $|A_i| - |B_i| \leq \lceil e_G(A_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}$ ;*
- (ii) *there exists a spanning subgraph  $G'$  of  $G$  which is  $D$ -balanced with respect to  $\mathcal{V}^*$  and  $E(G') \subseteq E(G[C_1]) \cup E(G[C_2]) \cup E(G[A_1 \cup B_1, A_2])$ , where  $C_1 \in \{A_1, B_1\}$  and  $C_2 \in \{A_2, B_2\}$ .*

*Proof.* Observe that the graph obtained by removing  $E(G[A_i, B_i])$  from  $G$  for  $i = 1, 2$  is  $D$ -balanced. So we may assume that  $E(G[A_i, B_i]) = \emptyset$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Consider each of the pairs

$$\{G[A_1], G[B_1]\}, \{G[A_2], G[B_2]\}, \{G[A_1, A_2], G[B_1, B_2]\}, \{G[A_1, B_2], G[B_1, A_2]\}$$

of induced subgraphs. For each such pair  $\{J, J'\}$ , remove  $\min\{e_G(J), e_G(J')\}$  arbitrary edges from each of  $J, J'$  in  $G$ . Let  $H$  be the subgraph obtained from  $G$  in this way. Then  $H$  is  $D$ -balanced and for each pair  $\{J, J'\}$ , we have that  $E(H[V(J)]) = \emptyset$  whenever  $e_G(J) \leq e_G(J')$  (and vice versa). In particular,  $e_H(A_1, B_2) = 0$ . Suppose that we cannot take  $G' := H$  so that (ii) holds. Then  $H \subseteq G[C_1] \cup G[C_2] \cup G[B_1, A_2 \cup B_2]$  for some  $C_1 \in \{A_1, B_1\}$  and  $C_2 \in \{A_2, B_2\}$  with  $e_H(B_1, B_2) \geq 1$ . So  $e_H(A_1, A_2) = 0$ . Let  $v_i := D(|A_i| - |B_i|) \geq 0$ . Since  $H$  is  $D$ -balanced we

have that  $2e_H(A_1) - 2e_H(B_1) - e_H(B_1, A_2 \cup B_2) = v_1 \geq 0$ . In particular,  $e_H(A_1) \geq e_H(B_1)$ . So  $e_H(B_1) = 0$ . Let  $t := e_H(B_1, A_2)$ . Thus

$$(6.2) \quad \begin{aligned} 2e_H(A_1) &\geq v_1 + t + 1 \quad \text{and similarly} \\ 2e_H(A_2) &\geq v_2 - t + 1. \end{aligned}$$

Suppose first that  $t \geq v_2$ . Then  $2e_H(A_1) \geq v_1 + v_2 + 1$ . Since  $G$  is  $D$ -balanced, summing the two equations in (6.1) implies that  $v_1 + v_2$  is even. Let  $H_{B_1 A_2}$  consist of  $v_2$  arbitrary edges in  $H[B_1, A_2]$  and let  $H_{A_1}$  consist of  $(v_1 + v_2)/2$  arbitrary edges in  $H[A_1]$ . In this case, we let  $G' := H_{A_1} \cup H_{B_1 A_2}$ . So (ii) holds.

Suppose instead that  $t < v_2$ . First consider the case when  $t = 0$ . Then (6.2) implies that  $2e_G(A_i) \geq 2e_H(A_i) \geq v_i + 1$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Since  $\Delta(G[A_i]) \leq D/2$ , Vizing's theorem implies that  $G[A_i]$  contains a matching  $M_i$  of size

$$\left\lceil \frac{e_G(A_i)}{D/2 + 1} \right\rceil \geq \left\lceil \frac{D(|A_i| - |B_i|)/2}{D/2 + 1} \right\rceil \geq |A_i| - |B_i| - \lfloor D/(D+2) \rfloor = |A_i| - |B_i|.$$

Note that the right hand side is at most  $\lceil e(A_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}$ . So (i) holds.

Therefore we may assume that  $t > 0$ . Recall that  $v_1 \equiv v_2 \pmod{2}$ . We will choose  $H_{B_1 A_2} \subseteq H[B_1, A_2]$  and  $H_{A_i} \subseteq H[A_i]$  for  $i = 1, 2$  by arbitrarily choosing edges according to the relative parities of  $v_1$  and  $t$ , such that the following hold:

- if  $v_1 + t$  is even then choose  $e(H_{B_1 A_2}) = t$ ,  $2e(H_{A_1}) = v_1 + t$ ,  $2e(H_{A_2}) = v_2 - t$ ;
- if  $v_1 + t$  is odd then choose  $e(H_{B_1 A_2}) = t - 1$ ,  $2e(H_{A_1}) = v_1 + t - 1$ ,  $2e(H_{A_2}) = v_2 - t + 1$ .

These choices are possible by (6.2). We let  $G' := H_{A_1} \cup H_{A_2} \cup H_{B_1 A_2}$ . Observe that  $G'$  is  $D$ -balanced. So (ii) holds.  $\square$

Observe that the subgraph  $M_1 \cup M_2$  of  $G$  guaranteed by Lemma 6.4(i) is a 2-balanced path system. The next lemma shows that, when  $G$  is 3-connected, one can modify such a path system into one which also contains paths between  $A_1 \cup B_1$  and  $A_2 \cup B_2$ .

**Lemma 6.5.** *Let  $n, D \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $0 < 1/n \ll \gamma \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices. Let  $W_1, W_2$  be a partition of  $V(G)$  and let  $A_i, B_i$  be a partition of  $W_i$  for  $i = 1, 2$ , where  $|A_i| \geq |B_i|$ . Suppose that there exist matchings  $M_1, M_2$  in  $G[A_1], G[A_2]$  respectively so that  $|A_i| - |B_i| = e(M_i) \leq \lceil e(A_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}$  and  $e(M_i) \leq \gamma n$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  which is 2-balanced with respect to  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$  and contains a  $W_1 W_2$ -path, and  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq 3\gamma n$ .*

*Proof.* Proposition 6.2 implies that  $G$  is  $D$ -balanced with respect to  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$ . Suppose that there exist edges  $e \in E(G[A_1, A_2])$  and  $e' \in E(G[B_1, B_2])$ . Then we can take  $\mathcal{P} := M_1 \cup M_2 \cup \{e, e'\}$ . We are similarly done if there exist edges  $f \in E(G[A_1, B_2])$  and  $f' \in E(G[B_1, A_2])$ . If either of these two hold then we say that  $G$  contains a *balanced matching*. So we may assume that  $G$  does not contain a balanced matching. The 3-connectivity of  $G$  implies that there is a matching  $N$  of size at least three in  $G[W_1, W_2]$ . Since  $G$  does not contain a balanced matching,  $e_N(C_1, C_2) \geq 2$  for some  $C_i \in \{A_i, B_i\}$ . So we can choose a matching  $N'$  of size two in  $G[C_1, C_2]$ . Let  $D_i$  be such that  $\{C_i, D_i\} := \{A_i, B_i\}$ . Note that  $e_G(D_1, D_2) = 0$  or  $G$  would contain a balanced matching. Without loss of generality, we may assume that  $e(M_1) \leq e(M_2)$ .

**Case 1.**  $e(M_2) > 0$ .

Note that  $1 \leq e(M_2) \leq e_G(A_2)/5 + 3/4$ . Thus  $e_G(A_2) - e(M_2) \geq 4e_G(A_2)/5 - 3/4 > 0$ . So we can always choose an edge  $e_2 \in E(G[A_2]) \setminus E(M_2)$ . If possible, let  $f_2$  be the edge of  $M_2$  spanned by  $V(N') \cap A_2$ . If there is no such edge, let  $f_2$  be an arbitrary edge in  $M_2$ . Let

$$M'_2 := \begin{cases} M_2 \setminus \{f_2\} & \text{if } C_2 = A_2 \\ M_2 \cup \{e_2\} & \text{if } C_2 = B_2. \end{cases}$$

**Case 1.a.**  $e(M_1) > 0$ .

Define  $e_1, f_1$  and hence  $M'_1$  analogously to  $e_2, f_2, M'_2$ . It is straightforward to check that  $\mathcal{P} := N' \cup M'_1 \cup M'_2$  is as required in the lemma.

**Case 1.b.**  $e(M_1) = 0$ .

We have  $|A_1| = |B_1|$ . Without loss of generality we may suppose that  $C_1 = A_1$  or we can swap  $A_1, B_1$ . So  $e_G(A_1, W_2) \geq e_N(C_1, C_2) \geq 2$ . Since  $G$  is  $D$ -balanced and  $e_G(B_1, C_2) = e_G(B_1, W_2)$ , this in turn implies that  $2e_G(B_1) + e_G(B_1, C_2) \geq 2$ . If  $e_G(B_1) > 0$  let  $e \in E(G[B_1])$  be arbitrary and define  $\mathcal{P} := N' \cup M'_2 \cup \{e\}$ . Otherwise, there exists  $e_{12} \in E(G[B_1, C_2])$ . Let  $e'_{12} \in E(N')$  be vertex-disjoint from  $e_{12}$ . If possible, let  $f'_2 \in E(M_2)$  be the edge spanning the endpoints of  $e_{12}, e'_{12}$  which lie in  $A_2$ ; otherwise, let  $f'_2 \in E(M_2)$  be arbitrary. If  $C_2 = A_2$ , let  $\mathcal{P} := M_2 \cup \{e_{12}, e'_{12}\} \setminus \{f'_2\}$ . If  $C_2 = B_2$ , let  $\mathcal{P} := M_2 \cup \{e_{12}, e'_{12}\}$ . It is straightforward to check that in all cases  $\mathcal{P}$  is as required in the lemma.

**Case 2.**  $e(M_2) = 0$ .

So  $e(M_1) = 0$  and  $|A_i| = |B_i|$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Without loss of generality, we may assume that  $C_i := A_i$  (and hence  $D_i := B_i$ ). Write  $\{i, j\} = \{1, 2\}$ . Since  $G$  is  $D$ -balanced we have that

$$2e_G(A_i) - 2e_G(B_i) + e_G(A_i, A_j) + e_G(A_i, B_j) - e_G(B_i, A_j) = 0.$$

So  $2e_G(B_i) + e_G(B_i, A_j) \geq e_N(A_1, A_2) \geq 2$ . Therefore either  $e_G(B_i) > 0$  or  $e_G(B_i, A_j) > 0$  (or both). So for  $i = 1, 2$ , either we can find  $e_i \in E(G[B_i])$  or  $e_{ij} \in E(G[B_i, A_j])$  (or both). Note that not both  $e_G(B_1, A_2), e_G(A_1, B_2)$  can be positive since  $G$  does not contain a balanced matching.

Suppose that  $e_G(B_1), e_G(B_2) > 0$ . Let  $\mathcal{P} := N' \cup \{e_1, e_2\}$ , as required. Otherwise we may assume without loss of generality that  $e_G(B_1) > 0$  and  $e_G(B_2, A_1) > 0$ . Let  $e'_{12} \in N'$  be vertex-disjoint from  $e_{21}$ . Let  $\mathcal{P} := \{e_1, e'_{12}, e_{21}\}$ . It is straightforward to check that in both cases  $\mathcal{P}$  is as required in the lemma.  $\square$

**6.3. Tools for finding matchings.** Given any bipartite graph  $G$ , König's theorem on edge-colourings guarantees that we can find a matching of size at least  $\lceil e(G)/\Delta(G) \rceil$ . The following lemma shows that, given any matching  $M$  in  $G$ , we can find a matching  $M'$  of at least this size such that  $V(M) \subseteq V(M')$ .

**Lemma 6.6.** *Let  $G$  be a bipartite graph with vertex classes  $V, W$  such that  $\Delta(G) \leq \Delta$ . Let  $M$  be a matching in  $G$  with  $e(M) \leq \lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$ . Then there exists a matching  $M'$  in  $G$  such that  $e(M') = \lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$  and  $V(M) \subseteq V(M')$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $M'$  be a matching in  $G$  such that  $V(M) \subseteq V(M')$  and  $e(M') \leq \lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$  is maximal with this property. Suppose that  $e(M') < \lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$ . Since, by König's theorem on edge-colourings,  $G$  contains a matching of size  $\lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$ , this means that  $M'$  is not a maximum matching. So, by Berge's lemma,  $G$  contains an augmenting path  $P$  for  $M'$ , i.e. a path with endpoints not in  $V(M')$  which alternates between edges in  $E(M')$  and edges outside of  $E(M')$ . But then  $P \setminus E(M')$  is a matching contradicting the maximality of  $e(M')$ .  $\square$

We now show that given a bipartite graph  $G = (U, Z)$  and any partition  $V, W$  of  $Z$ , we can find a large matching in  $G$  which has the 'right' density in each of  $G[U, V]$  and  $G[U, W]$ .

**Lemma 6.7.** *Let  $G$  be a bipartite graph with vertex classes  $U, V \cup W$ , where  $V, W$  are disjoint. Suppose that  $\Delta(G) \leq \Delta$ . Let  $b_V, b_W$  be non-negative integers such that  $b_V + b_W \leq \lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$ ,  $b_V \leq \lceil e_G(U, V)/\Delta \rceil$  and  $b_W \leq \lceil e_G(U, W)/\Delta \rceil$ . Then  $G$  contains a matching  $M$  such that  $e_M(U, V) = b_V$  and  $e_M(U, W) = b_W$ .*

*Proof.* By increasing  $b_V, b_W$  if necessary, we may assume that  $b_V + b_W = \lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$ . Note that either  $b_V = \lceil e_G(U, V)/\Delta \rceil$ , or  $b_W = \lceil e_G(U, W)/\Delta \rceil$ , or both. Suppose without loss of generality

that  $b_V = \lceil e_G(U, V)/\Delta \rceil$ . Choose a matching  $M'$  in  $G$  of size  $\lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$ . Let  $m_V := e_{M'}(U, V)$  and let  $m_W := e_{M'}(U, W)$ . Let  $k := b_V - m_V$ . Then

$$m_W = \lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil - m_V = b_V + b_W - m_V = b_W + k.$$

If  $k = 0$  we are done, so suppose first that  $k > 0$ . Apply Lemma 6.6 to obtain a matching  $J_V$  in  $G[U, V]$  such that  $e(J_V) = b_V$  and  $V(J_V) \supseteq V(M'[U, V])$ . So  $|(V(J_V) \setminus V(M'[U, V])) \cap U| = k$ . Thus we can choose a submatching  $J_W$  of  $M'[U, W]$  of size  $m_W - k = b_W$  that is vertex-disjoint from  $J_V$ . Let  $M := J_V \cup J_W$ .

Otherwise,  $k < 0$ . Apply Lemma 6.6 to obtain a matching  $J_W$  in  $G[U, W]$  such that  $e(J_W) = b_W$  and  $V(J_W) \supseteq V(M'[U, W])$ . As above, we can choose a submatching  $J_V$  of  $M'[U, V]$  of size  $b_V$  that is vertex-disjoint from  $J_W$ . Let  $M := J_V \cup J_W$ .  $\square$

**6.4. Acyclic unions of matchings.** The next lemma shows that, in a graph with low maximum degree, we can find a large matching that does not completely span a given set of vertices.

**Proposition 6.8.** *Let  $0 < 1/\Delta \ll \eta \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with  $\Delta(G) \leq \eta\Delta$  and suppose that  $e(G) \geq 2\eta\Delta$ . Suppose that  $K \subseteq V(G)$ . Then there exists a matching  $M$  in  $G$  such that  $e(M) = \lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil$  and  $M[K]$  is not a perfect matching.*

*Proof.* By Vizing's theorem,  $G$  contains a matching  $M'$  of size

$$\left\lceil \frac{e(G)}{\Delta(G) + 1} \right\rceil \geq \left\lceil \frac{e(G)}{3\eta\Delta/2} \right\rceil \geq \left\lceil \frac{e(G)}{\Delta} \right\rceil + 1.$$

Delete edges so that  $M'$  has size  $\lceil e(G)/\Delta \rceil + 1$ . If  $M'$  contains an edge with both endpoints in  $K$ , remove this edge to obtain  $M$ . Otherwise, obtain  $M$  from  $M'$  by removing an arbitrary edge.  $\square$

Proposition 6.8 and the following observation will be used to guarantee that, given a matching  $M$  in  $G[W_1, A_2]$ , we can find a suitable matching  $N$  in  $G[A_2]$  such that the path system  $M \cup N$  contains a  $W_1 A_2$ -path.

**Fact 6.9.** *Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $U, V$  and let  $M$  be a non-empty matching between  $U$  and  $V$ . Let  $K := V(M) \cap V$  and let  $M'$  be a matching in  $G[V]$  such that  $M'[K]$  is not a perfect matching. Then  $M \cup M'$  is a path system containing a  $UV$ -path.*

Given a graph  $G$  with low maximum degree, vertex partition  $U, V$  and a non-empty matching  $M$  in  $G[U, V]$ , the next lemma shows that we can find matchings in  $G[U], G[V]$  which extend  $M$  into a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  containing a  $UV$ -path.

**Lemma 6.10.** *Let  $0 < 1/\Delta \ll \eta \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with partition  $U, V$  and suppose that  $\Delta(G) \leq \eta\Delta$ . Let  $M$  be a matching between  $U$  and  $V$ . Suppose further that  $e_G(U) \leq e_G(V) \leq \eta\Delta^2$ . Then there exist matchings  $M_U, M_V$  in  $G[U], G[V]$  respectively such that*

- (i)  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M_U \cup M_V$  is a path system;
- (ii)  $e(M_U) \leq \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil$  with equality if  $e_G(U) \geq \sqrt{\eta}\Delta$ ; and  $e(M_V) \leq \lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil$  with equality if  $e_G(V) \geq \sqrt{\eta}\Delta$ ;
- (iii) if  $M \neq \emptyset$ , then  $\mathcal{P}$  contains a  $UV$ -path.

*Proof.* If  $M = \emptyset$  then Vizing's theorem implies that we can find matchings  $M_U, M_V$  of size  $\lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil, \lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil$  respectively. Then (i)–(iii) hold. So we may assume that  $M \neq \emptyset$ . If  $e_G(U) \leq e_G(V) < \sqrt{\eta}\Delta$ , then we are done by taking  $M_U, M_V := \emptyset$ . Suppose instead that  $e_G(U) < \sqrt{\eta}\Delta \leq e_G(V)$ . Apply Proposition 6.8 with  $G[V], V(M) \cap V$  playing the roles of  $G, K$  to obtain a matching  $M_V$  in  $G[V]$  such that  $e(M_V) = \lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil$  and  $M_V[V(M) \cap V]$  is not a perfect matching. Fact 6.9 implies that we are done by taking  $M_U = \emptyset$ .

Therefore we may assume that  $\sqrt{\eta}\Delta \leq e_G(U) \leq e_G(V)$ . Apply Proposition 6.8 with  $G[U], V(M) \cap U$  playing the roles of  $G, K$  to obtain a matching  $M_U$  in  $G[U]$  of size  $\lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil$  such that  $M_U[V(M) \cap U]$  is not a perfect matching. Let  $\mathcal{P}_U$  be the path system with edge set  $E(M) \cup E(M_U)$ .

So Fact 6.9 implies that  $\mathcal{P}_U$  contains at least one  $UV$ -path  $P$ . Let  $u_0 \in U$  and  $v_0 \in V$  be the endpoints of  $P$ . Let  $Y$  be the set of all those vertices in  $V$  which are endpoints of a  $VV$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}_U$ . Now

$$(6.3) \quad |Y| \leq 2e(M_U) = 2\lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil \leq 2\lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil.$$

Obtain  $G'$  from  $G[V]$  by removing every edge incident with  $Y \cup \{v_0\}$ . So

$$e(G') \geq e_G(V) - \eta\Delta(|Y| + 1) \stackrel{(6.3)}{\geq} (1 - 4\sqrt{\eta})e_G(V) \geq e_G(V)/2.$$

So  $G'$  contains a matching of size

$$\lceil e(G')/(\eta\Delta + 1) \rceil \geq \lceil e(G')/2\eta\Delta \rceil \geq \lceil e_G(V)/4\eta\Delta \rceil \geq \lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil.$$

Let  $M_V$  be an arbitrary submatching of this matching of size  $\lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil$ . Let  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M_U \cup M_V$ .

Clearly (ii) holds. Observe that  $\mathcal{P}$  has a  $UV$ -path, namely  $P$ . Hence (iii) holds. To show (i), it is enough to show that  $\mathcal{P}$  is acyclic. Suppose not and let  $C$  be a cycle in  $\mathcal{P}$ . Now  $C$  contains at least one edge  $e \in E(M_V)$ . Then both endpoints of this edge belong to  $Y$ , and hence  $e \notin E(G')$ , a contradiction.  $\square$

The following is a version of Lemma 6.10 for sparse graphs which may have a small number of vertices with high degree.

**Lemma 6.11.** *Let  $0 < 1/\Delta \ll \rho \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $U, V$  and suppose that  $\Delta(G[U]), \Delta(G[V]) \leq \Delta$ . Let  $M$  be a matching between  $U$  and  $V$  such that  $e(M) \leq \rho\Delta$ . Suppose further that  $e_G(U), e_G(V) \leq \rho\Delta^2$ . Then, for any integers  $0 \leq a_U \leq \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4}$  and  $0 \leq a_V \leq \lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4}$ ,  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that*

- (i)  $\mathcal{P}[U, V] = M$  and both of  $\mathcal{P}[U], \mathcal{P}[V]$  are matchings;
- (ii)  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(U) = a_U$ ,  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V) = a_V$ ;
- (iii) if  $M \neq \emptyset$ , then  $\mathcal{P}$  contains a  $UV$ -path.

*Proof.* By removing edges in  $G[U]$  and  $G[V]$  we may assume without loss of generality that  $a_U = \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4}$  and  $a_V = \lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4}$ . Choose  $\eta$  with  $\rho \ll \eta \ll 1$ . Let  $U' := \{u \in U : d_U(u) \geq \eta\Delta\}$  and define  $V'$  analogously. Then  $2e_G(U) \geq \sum_{u \in U'} d_U(u) \geq |U'|\eta\Delta$  and similarly for  $V'$ , so

$$(6.4) \quad |U'|, |V'| \leq \sqrt{\rho}\Delta.$$

Let  $U_0 := U \setminus U'$  and  $V_0 := V \setminus V'$ . Let  $H$  be the graph with vertex set  $V(G)$  and edge set  $E(G[U_0]) \cup E(G[V_0]) \cup M$ . So  $E_H(U) = E_G(U_0)$  and  $E_H(V) = E_G(V_0)$ . Moreover,  $\Delta(H) \leq 2\eta\Delta$ . Note that

$$(6.5) \quad e_G(U_0) \geq e_G(U) - \Delta|U'| \quad \text{and} \quad e_G(V_0) \geq e_G(V) - \Delta|V'|.$$

Assume without loss of generality that  $e_G(U_0) \leq e_G(V_0)$ . Apply Lemma 6.10 with  $H, M, U, V, 2\eta$  playing the roles of  $G, M, U, V, \eta$  to obtain matchings  $M_{U_0}, M_{V_0}$  in  $H[U_0] = G[U_0], H[V_0] = G[V_0]$  respectively such that  $\mathcal{P}_0 := M \cup M_{U_0} \cup M_{V_0}$  is a path system satisfying Lemma 6.10(i)–(iii). So  $\mathcal{P}_0$  contains a  $UV$ -path if  $M \neq \emptyset$ . Moreover,  $e(M_{U_0}) \leq \lceil e_G(U_0)/\Delta \rceil$  with equality if  $e_G(U_0) \geq \sqrt{2\eta}\Delta$ , and  $e(M_{V_0}) \leq \lceil e_G(V_0)/\Delta \rceil$  with equality if  $e_G(V_0) \geq \sqrt{2\eta}\Delta$ . Thus

$$(6.6) \quad |V(\mathcal{P}_0)| \leq 2e(\mathcal{P}_0) \leq 2(e(M) + \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil + \lceil e_G(V)/\Delta \rceil) \leq \sqrt{\rho}\Delta.$$

For every  $u \in U'$  and  $v \in V'$  we have that

$$d_{U_0 \setminus V(\mathcal{P}_0)}(u), d_{V_0 \setminus V(\mathcal{P}_0)}(v) \stackrel{(6.6)}{\geq} \eta\Delta/2 \stackrel{(6.4)}{>} |U'|, |V'|.$$

So for each  $u \in U'$ , we may choose a distinct neighbour  $w_u \in U_0 \setminus V(\mathcal{P}_0)$  of  $u$ . Let  $M_{U'} := \{uw_u : u \in U'\} \subseteq G[U', U_0 \setminus V(\mathcal{P}_0)]$ . Define a matching  $M_{V'}$  in  $G[V', V_0 \setminus V(\mathcal{P}_0)]$  (which covers  $V'$ ) similarly.

Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup M_{U'} \cup M_{V'}$ . Note that  $\mathcal{P}$  is a path system since  $\mathcal{P}_0$  is. Certainly  $\mathcal{P}[U, V] = \mathcal{P}_0[U, V] = M$ , so (i) holds. Suppose that  $e_G(U_0) \geq \sqrt{2\eta}\Delta$ . Then

$$\begin{aligned} e_{\mathcal{P}}(U) &= e(M_{U_0}) + e(M_{U'}) = \lceil e_G(U_0)/\Delta \rceil + |U'| \stackrel{(6.5)}{\geq} \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta - |U'| \rceil + |U'| \\ &= \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil \geq \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4}. \end{aligned}$$

Suppose instead that  $e_G(U_0) < \sqrt{2\eta}\Delta$ . Then

$$e_{\mathcal{P}}(U) \geq |U'| \stackrel{(6.5)}{\geq} \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta - \sqrt{2\eta} \rceil \geq \lceil e_G(U)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4}$$

since  $\sqrt{2\eta} < 1/4$ . Analogous statements are true for  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V)$ . So by removing edges in  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(U), e_{\mathcal{P}}(V)$  if necessary, we may assume that (ii) holds. Note that  $\mathcal{P}$  has a  $UV$ -path if  $\mathcal{P}_0$  does (there is a one-to-one correspondence between the  $UV$ -paths in  $\mathcal{P}$  and the  $UV$ -paths in  $\mathcal{P}_0$ ).  $\square$

**6.5. Rounding.** Given a small collection of reals which sum to an integer, the following lemma shows that we can suitably round these reals so that their sum is unchanged. Lemmas 6.7 and 6.11 together enable us to find three matchings, one in each of  $G[W_1], G[W_2]$  and  $G[W_1, W_2]$ , each of which is not too large, such that their union is a path system  $\mathcal{P}$ . Lemma 6.12 will allow us to choose the size of each matching correctly, so that  $\mathcal{P}$  is 2-balanced.

**Lemma 6.12.** *Let  $0 < \varepsilon < 1/2$ . Let  $a_1, a_2, b, c \in \mathbb{R}$  with  $b, c \geq 0$  and let  $x_1, x_2 \in \mathbb{N}_0$ . Suppose that*

$$2a_1 + b - c = 2x_1 \quad \text{and} \quad 2a_2 + b + c = 2x_2.$$

*Then there exist integers  $a'_1, a'_2, b', c'$  such that*

$$2a'_1 + b' - c' = 2x_1 \quad \text{and} \quad 2a'_2 + b' + c' = 2x_2,$$

*where  $0 \leq b' \leq \lceil b \rceil$ ,  $0 \leq c' \leq \lceil c \rceil$ ,  $b' + c' \leq \lceil b + c \rceil$ ; and for  $i = 1, 2$ ,  $|a'_i| \leq \lceil |a_i| \rceil_\varepsilon$ ; and finally  $a'_i \geq 0$  if and only if  $a_i \geq 0$ .*

*Proof.* Note that

$$(6.7) \quad \lfloor 2a_1 \rfloor + \lfloor b - c \rfloor = 2x_1 \quad \text{and} \quad \lfloor 2a_2 \rfloor + \lfloor b + c \rfloor = 2x_2.$$

In particular, either  $\lfloor 2a_1 \rfloor, \lfloor b - c \rfloor$  are both odd, or both even. The same is true for the pair  $\lfloor 2a_2 \rfloor, \lfloor b + c \rfloor$ . Let  $A_i := \lfloor 2a_i \rfloor / 2$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Let also

$$B := \frac{\lfloor b + c \rfloor + \lfloor b - c \rfloor}{2} \quad \text{and} \quad C := \frac{\lfloor b + c \rfloor - \lfloor b - c \rfloor}{2}.$$

Observe that  $\{A_1, A_2, B, C\} \subseteq \mathbb{Z} \cup (\mathbb{Z} + 1/2)$ . Let  $i \in \{1, 2\}$ . Suppose first that  $a_i \geq 0$  (and so  $A_i \geq 0$ ). If  $a_i - \lfloor a_i \rfloor \leq \varepsilon$  then  $2\lceil a_i \rceil_\varepsilon = 2\lfloor a_i \rfloor = \lfloor 2a_i \rfloor = 2A_i$ . If  $a_i - \lfloor a_i \rfloor > \varepsilon$  then  $2\lceil a_i \rceil_\varepsilon = 2\lceil a_i \rceil \geq \lfloor 2a_i \rfloor = 2A_i$ . Therefore  $\lceil A_i \rceil \leq \lceil a_i \rceil_\varepsilon$ . Suppose now that  $a_i < 0$  (and so  $A_i < 0$ ). If  $a_i - \lfloor a_i \rfloor < 1 - \varepsilon$  then  $2\lceil a_i + \varepsilon \rceil = 2\lfloor a_i \rfloor \leq \lfloor 2a_i \rfloor = 2A_i$ . If  $a_i - \lfloor a_i \rfloor \geq 1 - \varepsilon$  then  $2\lceil a_i + \varepsilon \rceil = 2\lfloor a_i \rfloor + 2 = \lfloor 2a_i \rfloor + 1 = 2A_i + 1$  since  $1 - \varepsilon \geq 1/2$ . Since  $-\lceil -a_i \rceil_\varepsilon = \lfloor a_i + \varepsilon \rfloor$ , this shows that  $-\lceil -a_i \rceil_\varepsilon \leq \lceil A_i \rceil$ . Altogether this implies that

$$(6.8) \quad \begin{aligned} |A_i| &\leq \lceil |a_i| \rceil_\varepsilon \quad \text{when } A_i \in \mathbb{Z}, \quad \text{and} \\ |A_i + 1/2| &\leq \lceil |a_i| \rceil_\varepsilon \quad \text{when } A_i \in \mathbb{Z} + 1/2. \end{aligned}$$

We also have that

$$(6.9) \quad B + C = \lfloor b + c \rfloor \quad \text{and} \quad B - C = \lfloor b - c \rfloor.$$

Note that

$$(6.10) \quad \begin{aligned} \lceil 2b \rceil &= \lceil b + c + b - c \rceil \leq 2B \leq \lceil b + c + (b - c) \rceil + 1 = \lceil 2b \rceil + 1 \leq 2\lceil b \rceil + 1; \\ \lceil 2c \rceil - 1 &= \lceil b + c - (b - c) \rceil - 1 \leq 2C \leq \lceil b + c - (b - c) \rceil = \lceil 2c \rceil \leq 2\lceil c \rceil. \end{aligned}$$



It is straightforward to check that these equations (together with the definition of  $C$ ) imply the following:

$$(6.11) \quad \begin{aligned} 0 \leq B \leq \lceil b \rceil & \quad \text{when } B \in \mathbb{Z} \\ 0 \leq B - 1/2 \leq \lceil b \rceil & \quad \text{when } B \in \mathbb{Z} + 1/2 \\ 0 \leq C \leq \lceil c \rceil & \quad \text{when } C \in \mathbb{Z} \\ 0 \leq C - 1/2 < C + 1/2 \leq \lceil c \rceil & \quad \text{when } C \in \mathbb{Z} + 1/2. \end{aligned}$$

Finally, note that (6.7) and (6.9) together imply that

$$(6.12) \quad 2A_1 + B - C = 2x_1 \quad \text{and} \quad 2A_2 + B + C = 2x_2.$$

We choose  $a'_1, a'_2, b', c'$  as follows:

	$a'_1$	$a'_2$	$b'$	$c'$	
(i)	$A_1$	$A_2$	$B$	$C$	if $\lceil b+c \rceil, \lceil b-c \rceil$ both even;
(ii)	$A_1 + 1/2$	$A_2$	$B - 1/2$	$C + 1/2$	if $\lceil b+c \rceil$ even, $\lceil b-c \rceil$ odd;
(iii)	$A_1$	$A_2 + 1/2$	$B - 1/2$	$C - 1/2$	if $\lceil b+c \rceil$ odd, $\lceil b-c \rceil$ even;
(iv)	$A_1 + 1/2$	$A_2 + 1/2$	$B - 1$	$C$	if $b > 0$ and $\lceil b+c \rceil, \lceil b-c \rceil$ both odd;
(v)	$A_1 - 1/2$	$A_2 + 1/2$	$B$	$C - 1$	if $b = 0$ and $\lceil b+c \rceil, \lceil b-c \rceil$ both odd.

By the definition of  $A_i$  we have for each  $i = 1, 2$  that  $a'_i \geq 0$  if and only if  $a_i \geq 0$ . Then  $\{a'_1, a'_2, b', c'\} \subseteq \mathbb{Z}$  and (6.12) implies that

$$2a'_1 + b' - c' = 2x_1 \quad \text{and} \quad 2a'_2 + b' + c' = 2x_2.$$

Moreover,  $b' + c' \leq B + C = \lceil b+c \rceil$ . We claim that  $0 \leq b' \leq \lceil b \rceil$  and  $0 \leq c' \leq \lceil c \rceil$  and  $|a'_i| \leq \lceil |a_i| \rceil_\varepsilon$  for  $i = 1, 2$  respectively in all cases (i)–(v). To see this, suppose first that we are in case (iv). Since  $b > 0$ , (6.10) implies that  $B \geq \lceil 2b \rceil / 2 > 0$ , so, since  $B \in \mathbb{Z}$ ,  $B - 1 \geq 0$  in this case.

Suppose now that we are in case (v). Then  $\lceil c \rceil, \lceil -c \rceil = -\lfloor c \rfloor$  are both odd. Therefore  $\lceil c \rceil, \lfloor c \rfloor$  are both odd so  $\lceil c \rceil = \lfloor c \rfloor = c$ . So  $c \in \mathbb{N}_0$  is odd,  $B = 0$  and  $C = c$ . Thus  $C - 1 \geq 0$ . Moreover  $c = 2A_1 - 2x_1$ , so  $2A_1$  is odd and positive, which implies that  $A_1 - 1/2 \geq 0$ . Then (6.8) implies that  $|A_1 - 1/2| \leq \lceil |a_i| \rceil_\varepsilon$ .

In all cases (i)–(v), these last deductions together with (6.8)–(6.11) complete the proof of the lemma.  $\square$

**6.6. Proof of Lemma 6.1.** Before we can prove Lemma 6.1, we need one more preliminary result which guarantees a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  that can balance out the vertex class sizes of the bipartite graphs induced by the  $W_i$ . If  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(W_1, W_2) = 0$ , then we will use 3-connectivity (via Lemma 6.5) to modify  $\mathcal{P}$  into a balanced path system which also links up the  $W_i$ .

**Lemma 6.13.** *Let  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll \alpha < 1$  and let  $G$  be a  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices with  $D \geq \alpha n$ . Suppose that  $G$  has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V} := \{W_1, W_2\}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, 0, 2$ . For each  $i = 1, 2$ , let  $A_i, B_i$  be the bipartition of  $W_i$  guaranteed by (D3), and suppose that  $|A_i| \geq |B_i|$ . Then*

- (i)  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  which is 2-balanced with respect to  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$  such that  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \sqrt{\rho}n$ ;
- (ii) if  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(W_1, W_2) > 0$  then  $\mathcal{P}$  contains a  $W_1 W_2$ -path;
- (iii) for  $i = 1, 2$ ,  $\mathcal{P}[W_i]$  consists either of a matching in  $G[A_i]$  of size at most  $\lceil e_G(A_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}$ , or a matching in  $G[B_i]$  of size at most  $\lceil e_G(B_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}$ .

*Proof.* Write  $\mathcal{V}^* := (A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$ . Let  $\Delta := D/2$  and note that

$$\Delta(G[A_i]), \Delta(G[B_i]), \Delta(G[W_1, W_2]) \leq \Delta$$

for  $i = 1, 2$  by (D4) and (D5). Without loss of generality, we may suppose that  $e_G(A_1, B_2) \leq e_G(B_1, A_2)$ . Note that  $G$  is  $D$ -balanced with respect to  $\mathcal{V}^*$  by Proposition 6.2. Apply Lemma 6.4 to  $G$ . Suppose that Lemma 6.4(i) holds. Then  $G[A_i]$  contains a matching  $M_i$  of size  $|A_i| - |B_i| \leq \lceil e_G(A_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Set  $\mathcal{P} := M_1 \cup M_2$ . So (iii) holds, (D3) and (C2) imply that (i) holds, and (ii) is vacuous.

So we may assume that Lemma 6.4(ii) holds. Let  $H$  be a spanning subgraph of  $G$  which is  $D$ -balanced with respect to  $\mathcal{V}^*$  such that  $E(H) \subseteq E(G[C_1]) \cup E(G[C_2]) \cup E(G[W_1, A_2])$  for some  $C_1 \in \{A_1, B_1\}$  and  $C_2 \in \{A_2, B_2\}$ . Observe that

$$(6.13) \quad e(H) \leq \sum_{i=1,2} (e_G(A_i, \overline{B_i}) + e_G(B_i, \overline{A_i})) \stackrel{(D3), (C3)}{\leq} 2\rho n^2.$$

For each  $H' \subseteq H$  and  $i = 1, 2$ , define

$$(6.14) \quad f_i(H') = e_{H'}(A_i) - e_{H'}(B_i).$$

Now (6.1) implies that, for any  $t \in \mathbb{N}_0$ ,  $H'$  is  $t$ -balanced if

$$(6.15) \quad 2f_i(H') + e_{H'}(A_i, W_j) - e_{H'}(B_i, W_j) = t(|A_i| - |B_i|)$$

for  $\{i, j\} = \{1, 2\}$ . Observe that  $e_H(C_i) = e_H(W_i) = |f_i(H)|$ . For  $i = 1, 2$ , let

$$(6.16) \quad a_i := f_i(H)/\Delta.$$

Then the  $D$ -balancedness of  $H$  and (6.15) imply that

$$\begin{aligned} 2a_1 + \frac{e_H(A_1, A_2)}{\Delta} - \frac{e_H(B_1, A_2)}{\Delta} &= 2(|A_1| - |B_1|) \\ \text{and } 2a_2 + \frac{e_H(A_1, A_2)}{\Delta} + \frac{e_H(B_1, A_2)}{\Delta} &= 2(|A_2| - |B_2|). \end{aligned}$$

Apply Lemma 6.12 with  $a_1, a_2, e_H(A_1, A_2)/\Delta, e_H(B_1, A_2)/\Delta, |A_1| - |B_1|, |A_2| - |B_2|, 1/4$  playing the roles of  $a_1, a_2, b, c, x_1, x_2, \varepsilon$  to obtain integers  $a'_1, a'_2, b', c'$  with

$$(6.17) \quad |a'_i| \leq \lceil |a_i| \rceil_{1/4} = \lceil e_H(C_i)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4} \quad \text{for } i = 1, 2;$$

$$(6.18) \quad a'_i \geq 0 \quad \text{if and only if} \quad a_i \geq 0;$$

$$0 \leq b' \leq \lceil e_H(A_1, A_2)/\Delta \rceil; \quad 0 \leq c' \leq \lceil e_H(B_1, A_2)/\Delta \rceil \quad \text{and}$$

$$(6.19) \quad b' + c' \leq \lceil e_H(W_1, A_2)/\Delta \rceil;$$

$$(6.20) \quad 2a'_1 + b' - c' = 2(|A_1| - |B_1|) \quad \text{and} \quad 2a'_2 + b' + c' = 2(|A_2| - |B_2|).$$

Apply Lemma 6.7 with  $H[W_2, W_1], W_2, A_1, B_1$  playing the roles of  $G, U, V, W$  to obtain a matching  $M$  in  $H[W_2, W_1]$  such that

$$(6.21) \quad e_M(A_1, A_2) = e_M(A_1, W_2) = b', \quad e_M(B_1, A_2) = e_M(B_1, W_2) = c' \\ \text{and} \quad e_M(W_1, B_2) = 0.$$

Then (6.13) and (6.19) imply that  $e(M) = b' + c' \leq \lceil e(H)/\Delta \rceil \leq \sqrt{\rho}\Delta$ . By (6.13) and (6.17), we can apply Lemma 6.11 to  $H$  with  $\sqrt{\rho}, M, \Delta, W_1, W_2, |a'_1|, |a'_2|$  playing the roles of  $\rho, M, \Delta, U, V, a_U, a_V$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that

$$(6.22) \quad \mathcal{P}[W_1, W_2] = M;$$

$$(6.23) \quad e_{\mathcal{P}}(W_i) = e_{\mathcal{P}}(C_i) = |a'_i| \quad \text{for } i = 1, 2;$$

$\mathcal{P}[C_i]$  is a matching for  $i = 1, 2$ , and if  $M \neq \emptyset$ , then  $\mathcal{P}$  contains a  $W_1 W_2$ -path. So (ii) holds. (Note that (6.23) follows from the fact that  $H[W_i] = H[C_i]$ .) Moreover, (6.17) and (6.23) imply that the

matching  $\mathcal{P}[C_i]$  has size at most  $\lceil e_H(C_i)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4} \leq \lceil e_G(C_i)/\Delta \rceil_{1/4} \leq \lceil e_G(C_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}$ . So (iii) holds. Equations (6.14), (6.16), (6.18) and (6.23) imply that

$$(6.24) \quad f_i(\mathcal{P}) = a'_i.$$

Furthermore, by (6.21) and (6.22) we have

$$e_{\mathcal{P}}(A_1, W_2) - e_{\mathcal{P}}(B_1, W_2) = b' - c' \quad \text{and} \quad e_{\mathcal{P}}(W_1, A_2) - e_{\mathcal{P}}(W_1, B_2) = b' + c'.$$

Together with (6.15), (6.20) and (6.24), this implies that  $\mathcal{P}$  is 2-balanced with respect to  $\mathcal{V}^*$ . Finally,

$$e(\mathcal{P}) = |a'_1| + |a'_2| + b' + c' \stackrel{(6.17), (6.19)}{\leq} e(H)/\Delta + 3 \stackrel{(6.13)}{\leq} \sqrt{\rho}n,$$

as required.  $\square$

*Proof of Lemma 6.1.* Let  $\mathcal{V} := \{W_1, W_2\}$  and for  $i = 1, 2$ , let  $A_i, B_i$  be the partition of  $W_i$  guaranteed by (D3). Without loss of generality, we may suppose that  $|A_i| \geq |B_i|$ . Apply Lemma 6.13 to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  which is 2-balanced with respect to  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$  such that  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \sqrt{\rho}n$ .

Suppose first that  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(W_1, W_2) > 0$ . Then  $\mathcal{P}$  contains a  $W_1W_2$ -path by Lemma 6.13(ii). So we are done by Proposition 6.3. Therefore we may assume that  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(W_1, W_2) = 0$ . Lemma 6.13(iii) implies that, for each  $i = 1, 2$ , at least one of  $\mathcal{P}[A_i], \mathcal{P}[B_i]$  is empty, and the other is a matching of size at most  $\lceil e_G(B_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}, \lceil e_G(A_i)/5 \rceil_{1/4}$  respectively. The 2-balancedness of  $\mathcal{P}$  implies that  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(A_i) - e_{\mathcal{P}}(B_i) = |A_i| - |B_i| \geq 0$ . So  $\mathcal{P} = M_1 \cup M_2$  for some matchings  $M_i \subseteq G[A_i]$ . Apply Lemma 6.5 to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  which is 2-balanced with respect to  $(A_1, B_1, A_2, B_2)$  and contains a  $W_1W_2$ -path, and  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq 3\sqrt{\rho}n$ . Again, we are done by Proposition 6.3.  $\square$

## 7. (2,1) : TWO ROBUST EXPANDER COMPONENTS AND ONE BIPARTITE ROBUST EXPANDER COMPONENT

The aim of this section is to prove the following lemma.

**Lemma 7.1.** *Let  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices where  $D \geq n/4$ . Let  $\mathcal{X}$  be a robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, 2, 1$ . Then  $G$  contains a Hamilton cycle.*

This — the final case — is the longest and most difficult. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the extremal example in Figure 1(i) has precisely this structure. Moreover, the presence of a bipartite robust expander component means that the path system we find to join the robust components needs to be balanced with respect to the bipartite component — the regularity of  $G$  is essential to achieve this. On the other hand, since we have to join up three components, the 3-connectivity of  $G$  is essential too. The main challenge is to find a path system which satisfies both requirements simultaneously, i.e. one that is both balanced and joins up the three components. We need to invoke the degree bound  $D \geq n/4$  for this. We begin by giving a brief outline of the argument.

**7.1. Sketch of the proof of Lemma 7.1.** Let  $\mathcal{X} := \{V'_1, V'_2, W'\}$ , where  $G[V'_i]$  is a robust expander component for  $i = 1, 2$ , and  $G[W']$  is a bipartite robust expander component with bipartition  $A', B'$ , where  $|A'| \geq |B'|$ . One can hope to use the regularity of  $G$  to find a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  consisting of a matching in  $A'$ , together with a matching from  $A'$  to  $U' := V'_1 \cup V'_2$ , which balances (the sizes of the vertex classes  $A', B'$  of)  $G[W']$ . However,  $\mathcal{P}'$  may not connect  $W'$  to each of  $V'_1$  and  $V'_2$  in the right way. We could for example have that  $e_{\mathcal{P}'}(W', V'_1) = 0$  or that  $e_{\mathcal{P}'}(W', V'_1)$  is odd. In both cases,  $\mathcal{P}'$  requires modification. But if one adds an edge to  $\mathcal{P}'$  between one of the  $V'_i$  and  $W'$ , then  $\mathcal{P}'$  will no longer balance  $G[W']$ , meaning that  $\mathcal{P}'$  must be further adapted.

It turns out that it is better to begin with a small path system  $\mathcal{P}_0$  for which  $R_{\mathcal{X}}(\mathcal{P}_0)$  has an Euler tour, but which does not necessarily balance  $G[W']$ . If  $\mathcal{P}_0$  also balances  $G[W']$  then we are done. So suppose not. We then attempt to balance  $\mathcal{P}_0$  by adding edges of  $G[W']$  to  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . When such an attempt fails, we will slightly modify  $\mathcal{P}_0$  using the additional structural information about  $G$  that this failure implies. We then add edges of  $G[W']$  to the modified path system.

To find  $\mathcal{P}_0$  which corresponds to an Euler tour, one could simply use Lemma 4.8. However, since the proof of the lemma uses the 3-connectivity of  $G$ , we have insufficient control on the structure of  $\mathcal{P}_0$  (i.e. it may not be possible to extend it into a balancing path system). Instead, we will construct  $\mathcal{P}_0$  by first finding a large matching  $M$  in  $G[A', \overline{W}']$ . Typically this matching will be obtained using König's theorem on edge-colourings, so  $e(M) \geq e_G(A', \overline{W}')/\Delta(G[A', \overline{W}'])$ . Since  $\mathcal{X}$  is a robust partition, (D4) implies that  $\Delta(G[A', \overline{W}']) \leq 2D/3$ . This would give  $e(M) \geq 3e_G(A', \overline{W}')/2D$ , which is insufficient for our purposes. To improve on this, we alter the partition  $\mathcal{X}$  very slightly to obtain a weak robust partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W\}$  so that  $\Delta(G[W, \overline{W}]) \leq D/2$  (where  $G[V_1]$  and  $G[V_2]$  are robust expander components and  $G[W]$  is a bipartite robust expander component with bipartition  $A, B$ , where  $|A| \geq |B|$ ). By Lemma 4.10 it is *still* sufficient to find a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour using the approach outlined above (see Lemma 7.3 and Subsection 7.3 for the statement and proof of this reduction). Now the matching in  $G[A, \overline{W}]$  which will be used to construct the initial path system  $\mathcal{P}_0$  has size at least  $2e_G(A, \overline{W})/D$ .

We prove Lemma 7.1 separately in each of the following four cases:

- $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  and  $e_G(A, \overline{W})$  is at least a little larger than  $3D/2$  (Subsection 7.5);
- $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  and  $e_G(A, \overline{W})$  is at most a little larger than  $3D/2$  (Subsection 7.6);
- $|A| - |B| = 1$  (Subsection 7.7);
- $|A| = |B|$  (Subsection 7.8).

The reason for these distinctions will be discussed at the end of Subsection 7.4. The full strength of the minimum degree bound  $D \geq n/4$  is only used in the last two cases.

**7.2. Notation.** Throughout the remainder of the paper, whenever we say that a graph  $G$  has vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ , we assume that  $V(G)$  has a partition into parts  $V_1, V_2, W$ , each of size at least  $|V(G)|/100 \geq 100$ , that  $A$  and  $B$  are disjoint and  $|A| \geq |B|$ . Moreover, we will say that  $G$  has a weak robust partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$  (for some given parameters) if  $\mathcal{V}$  satisfies the above properties and is a weak robust partition of  $G$  such that  $G[V_1], G[V_2]$  are two robust expander components and  $G[W]$  is a bipartite robust expander component, and the bipartition of  $W$  as specified by (D3') is  $A, B$ . We will use a similar notation when  $\mathcal{V}$  is a robust partition of  $G$ .

Given  $0 < \varepsilon < 1$  and  $\Delta > 0$ , consider any graph  $G$  with vertex partition  $U, A, B$  such that  $\Delta(G[A]), \Delta(G[A, U]) \leq \Delta$ . We say that

$$(7.1) \quad \text{char}_{\Delta, \varepsilon}(G) := (\ell, m)$$

when  $\ell := \lceil e_G(A)/\Delta \rceil_\varepsilon$  and  $m$  is the largest even integer less than or equal to  $\lceil e_G(A, U)/\Delta \rceil_\varepsilon$ . (Recall the definition of  $\lceil \cdot \rceil_\varepsilon$  from the end of Subsection 4.1.) Given any path system  $\mathcal{P}$  in  $G$ , we write

$$(7.2) \quad \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) := e_{\mathcal{P}}(A) - e_{\mathcal{P}}(B) + (e_{\mathcal{P}}(A, U) - e_{\mathcal{P}}(B, U))/2.$$

When  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$  is a vertex partition of  $G$ , we take  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$  in the definitions of  $\text{char}_{\Delta, \varepsilon}$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}$ .

Given  $0 < \varepsilon < 1$ ,  $\Delta > 0$  and a graph  $G$  with partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$  and  $\text{char}_{\Delta, \varepsilon}(G) = (\ell, m)$ , we will find a path system satisfying the following properties:

- (P1)  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell + m + 6$ ;
- (P2)  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = |A| - |B|$ ;
- (P3)  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour.

**7.3. Preliminaries and a reduction.** In this subsection we show that, in order to prove Lemma 7.1, it is sufficient to prove Lemma 7.3 below. We then state some tools which will be used in the next subsections to do so. The following observation provides us with a convenient check for a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  to be such that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour.

**Fact 7.2.** *Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V}$  into three parts. Then, for a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  in  $G$ , (P3) is equivalent to the following. For each  $X \in \mathcal{V}$ ,  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(X, \overline{X})$  is even and there exists  $X' \in \mathcal{V} \setminus \{X\}$  such that  $\mathcal{P}$  contains an  $XX'$ -path.*

The remainder of Section 7 is devoted to the proof of the following lemma, which states that  $G$  contains a path system satisfying (P1)–(P3) (when the partition  $\mathcal{V}$  and the parameters involved are suitably defined).

**Lemma 7.3.** *Let  $n, D \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $\ell, m \in \mathbb{N}_0$ . Let  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll \varepsilon \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n$  vertices where  $D \geq n/4$ . Suppose that  $G$  has a weak robust partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, 1/16, 2, 1$  such that  $|V_1|, |V_2| \geq D/2$ . Suppose further that  $\Delta(G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]) \leq D/2$ ,  $d_{V_i}(x_i) \geq d_{V_j}(x_i)$  for all  $x_i \in V_i$  and all  $\{i, j\} = \{1, 2\}$ , and  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$  for all  $a \in A$ . Let  $\text{char}_{D/2, \varepsilon}(G) = (\ell, m)$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  satisfying (P1)–(P3).*

The following proposition gives bounds on  $\ell$  and  $m$  when  $\text{char}_{\Delta, \varepsilon}(G) = (\ell, m)$ .

**Proposition 7.4.** *Let  $n, D \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $\ell, m \in \mathbb{N}_0$ . Let  $0 < 1/n \ll \rho \ll \nu \ll \tau \ll \varepsilon, \eta \ll 1$  and suppose  $D \geq n/4$ . Let  $G$  be a graph on  $n$  vertices with weak robust partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, \eta, 2, 1$ . Suppose further that  $\Delta(G[A]), \Delta(G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]) \leq D/2$  and that  $\text{char}_{D/2, \varepsilon}(G) = (\ell, m)$ . Then  $\ell, m \leq 12\rho n$ .*

*Proof.* (D3') implies that  $G[W]$  is  $\rho$ -close to bipartite with bipartition  $A, B$ . So  $e_G(A) + e_G(A, V_1 \cup V_2) \leq \rho n^2$ . Thus  $\ell = \lceil 2e_G(A)/D \rceil_{\varepsilon} \leq 3\rho n^2/D \leq 12\rho n$ . An almost identical calculation gives the same bound for  $m$ .  $\square$

We now show that, to prove Lemma 7.1, it suffices to prove Lemma 7.3.

*Proof of Lemma 7.1 (assuming Lemma 7.3).* Choose  $\varepsilon$  with  $\tau \ll \varepsilon \ll 1$ . Let  $\mathcal{X} = \{U_1, U_2, W' := A' \cup B'\}$  be a robust partition of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, 2, 1$ , where  $G[U_1], G[U_2]$  are  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander components and  $G[W']$  is a bipartite  $(\rho, \nu, \tau)$ -robust expander component with bipartition  $A', B'$  as guaranteed by (D3). We will alter  $\mathcal{X}$  slightly so that it is a weak robust partition and that additionally the degree conditions of Lemma 7.3 hold.

**Claim.** *There exists a weak robust partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$  of  $G$  with parameters  $\rho^{1/3}, \nu/2, 2\tau, 1/16, 2, 1$  such that  $|V_1|, |V_2| \geq D/2$ ,  $\Delta(G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]) \leq D/2$ ,  $d_{V_i}(x_i) \geq d_{V_j}(x_i)$  for all  $x_i \in V_i$  and  $\{i, j\} = \{1, 2\}$ , and  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$  for all  $a \in A$ .*

To prove the claim, for  $i = 1, 2$ , let  $X_i$  be the collection of vertices  $x \in U_i$  with  $d_{\overline{U_i}}(x) > \rho n$ . Then (D7) implies that  $|X_i| \leq \rho n$ . Let  $Y_i := U_i \setminus X_i$ . Then each  $y \in Y_i$  satisfies

$$(7.3) \quad d_{Y_i}(y) = d(y) - d_{\overline{U_i} \cup X_i}(y) \geq d(y) - \rho n - |X_i| \geq d(y) - 2\rho n.$$

Let  $A_0$  be the collection of vertices  $a \in A'$  such that  $d_{\overline{B'}}(a) \geq \sqrt{\rho n}$ . Let  $A_1 := A' \setminus A_0$ . Define  $B_0, B_1$  analogously. By (D3),  $G[W']$  is  $\rho$ -close to bipartite with bipartition  $A', B'$ . Therefore (C3) holds, from which one can easily derive that  $|A_0|, |B_0| \leq 2\sqrt{\rho n}$ . Similarly as in (7.3), for each  $a \in A_1$  and  $b \in B_1$  we have

$$(7.4) \quad d_{B_1}(a) \geq d(a) - 3\sqrt{\rho n} \quad \text{and} \quad d_{A_1}(b) \geq d(b) - 3\sqrt{\rho n}.$$

Let  $V_0 := X_1 \cup X_2 \cup A_0 \cup B_0$ . Then

$$(7.5) \quad |V_0| \leq 5\sqrt{\rho n}.$$

Among all partitions  $X'_1, X'_2, A'_0, B'_0$  of  $V_0$ , choose one such that  $e(A \cup B, V_1 \cup V_2)$  is minimised; and subject to  $e(A \cup B, V_1 \cup V_2)$  being minimal we have that  $e(V_1, V_2) + e(A) + e(B)$  is minimal, where  $V_i := Y_i \cup X'_i$ ,  $A := A_1 \cup A'_0$  and  $B := B_1 \cup B'_0$ . It is easy to see that  $d_{A \cup B}(w) \geq d_{V_1 \cup V_2}(w)$  for all  $w \in A'_0 \cup B'_0$ ;  $d_{V_1 \cup V_2}(v) \geq d_{A \cup B}(v)$  for all  $v \in X'_1 \cup X'_2$ ;  $d_{V_i}(v_i) \geq d_{V_j}(v_i)$  for all  $v_i \in X'_i$  and  $\{i, j\} = \{1, 2\}$ ;  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$  for all  $a \in A'_0$ ; and  $d_B(b) \leq d_A(b)$  for all  $b \in B'_0$ . If  $v_i \in Y_i$ , then (7.3) implies that  $d_{V_i}(v_i) \geq d_{Y_i}(v_i) \geq d(v_i) - 2\rho n \geq d(v_i)/2$ . So  $d_{V_i}(v_i) \geq d_{A \cup B}(v_i), d_{V_j}(v_i)$  for  $\{i, j\} = \{1, 2\}$ . Similarly, (7.4) implies that, for all  $w \in A_1 \cup B_1$  we have  $d_{A \cup B}(w) \geq d_{V_1 \cup V_2}(w)$ ; for all  $a \in A_1$  we have  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$  and for all  $b \in B_1$  we have  $d_B(b) \leq d_A(b)$ . Observe that (7.3), (7.4) imply that  $|V_i| \geq D - 2\rho n$  and  $|A|, |B| \geq D - 3\sqrt{\rho}n$  respectively. It remains to prove that  $\mathcal{V} := \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$  is a weak robust partition with parameters  $\rho^{1/3}, \nu/2, 2\tau, 1/16, 2, 1$ . Property (D1') is clear. By relabelling if necessary, we may assume that  $|A| \geq |B|$ . We now prove (D2'). Observe that

$$e(V_i, \overline{V_i}) \leq e(U_i, \overline{U_i}) + D|X_i| + D|X'_i| \leq (\rho + 6\sqrt{\rho})n^2 \leq \rho^{1/3}n^2.$$

Therefore each  $V_i$  is a  $\rho^{1/3}$ -robust component of  $G$ . Note also that

$$|V_i \Delta U_i| \leq |V_0| \stackrel{(7.5)}{\leq} 5\sqrt{\rho}n \leq \nu|U_i|/2.$$

Lemma 4.1 implies that  $G[V_i]$  is a  $(\nu/2, 2\tau)$ -robust expander. Therefore  $G[V_i]$  is a  $(\rho^{1/3}, \nu/2, 2\tau)$ -robust expander component for  $i = 1, 2$ , so (D2') holds. To prove (D3'), note that  $|A \Delta A'| + |B \Delta B'| \leq 2|V_0| \leq \rho^{1/3}n/3$  where the final inequality follows from (7.5). Now Lemma 4.3 implies that  $G[A \cup B]$  is a bipartite  $(\rho^{1/3}, \nu/2, 2\tau)$ -robust expander component of  $G$  with bipartition  $A, B$ . Thus (D3') holds. Finally, (D4') and (D5') are clear from the degree conditions we have already obtained. This completes the proof of the claim.

Given the partition  $\mathcal{V}$  of  $V(G)$ , let  $\ell, m$  satisfy  $\text{char}_{D/2, \varepsilon}(G) = (\ell, m)$ . Let  $\mathcal{P}$  be a path system in  $G$  guaranteed by Lemma 7.3, i.e.  $\mathcal{P}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Note that  $\mathcal{V}$  is also a weak robust partition with parameters  $\rho^{1/3}, \nu/2, 2\tau, \varepsilon, 2, 1$ . So (P1) and Proposition 7.4 with  $\rho^{1/3}, \varepsilon$  playing the roles of  $\rho, \eta$  imply that  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq 25\rho^{1/3}n$ . Then, for each  $X \in \mathcal{V}$  we have that  $|V(\mathcal{P}) \cap X| \leq |V(\mathcal{P})| \leq 2e(\mathcal{P}) \leq 50\rho^{1/3}n \leq \rho^{1/4}n/9$ . So Lemma 4.9 applied with  $2, 1, W, A, B, \mathcal{P}, \rho^{1/4}/9$  playing the roles of  $k, \ell, W_j, A_j, B_j, \mathcal{P}, \rho$  implies that  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  that is a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour with parameter  $\rho^{1/4}$ . Now Lemma 4.10 with  $\mathcal{P}', \rho^{1/3}, \rho^{1/4}, \nu/2, 2\tau, 1/16, 2, 1$  playing the roles of  $\mathcal{P}, \rho, \gamma, \nu, \tau, \eta, k, \ell$  implies that  $G$  contains a Hamilton cycle.  $\square$

**7.4. Tools.** In this section we gather some useful tools which will be used repeatedly in the sections to come. We will often use the following lower bounds for  $e_G(A), e_G(A, U)$  implied by  $\text{char}_{\Delta, \varepsilon}(G)$ .

**Proposition 7.5.** *Let  $\Delta, \Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $\ell, m \in \mathbb{N}_0$ . Let  $\Delta'/\Delta \leq \varepsilon < 1$ . Suppose that  $G$  is a graph with vertex partition  $U, A, B$  such that  $\Delta(G[A]), \Delta(G[A, U]) \leq \Delta$  and  $\text{char}_{\Delta, \varepsilon}(G) = (\ell, m)$ . Then  $e_G(A) \geq (\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta'$  and  $e_G(A, U) \geq (m - 1)\Delta + \Delta'$ .*

*Proof.* We have that  $\ell = \lceil e_G(A)/\Delta \rceil_\varepsilon = \lceil e_G(A)/\Delta - \varepsilon \rceil$  so  $\ell - 1 < e_G(A)/\Delta - \varepsilon \leq (e_G(A) - \Delta')/\Delta$ , as required. A near identical calculation proves the second assertion.  $\square$

The path system we require will contain edges in  $G[A]$  and  $G[V_1 \cup V_2, A]$ , and will ‘roughly look like’ a matching within each of these subgraphs. The following lemma allows us to find a structure which in turn contains a large matching even if certain vertices need to be avoided.

**Lemma 7.6.** *Let  $\Delta, \Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$  and  $\ell \in \mathbb{N}_0$  be such that  $\ell/\Delta', \Delta'/\Delta, 1/\Delta' \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with  $\Delta(G) \leq \Delta$ , and let  $e(G) \geq (\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta'$ . Then  $G$  contains one of the following:*

- (i) *a matching  $M$  of size  $\ell + 1$  and  $uv \in E(G)$  with  $u \notin V(M)$ ;*
- (ii)  *$\ell$  vertices each with degree at least  $\Delta'$ .*

*Moreover, if  $\ell \geq 1$  and  $e(G) \geq \ell\Delta + 1$ ; or  $\ell = 0$  and  $e(G) \geq 2$ , then (i) holds.*

*Proof.* We will use induction on  $\ell$  in order to show that either (i) or (ii) holds. The cases  $\ell = 0, 1$  are trivial. Suppose now that  $\ell \geq 2$ . Suppose first that  $\Delta(G) \leq \Delta'$ . Then, by Vizing's theorem,  $E(G)$  can be properly coloured with at most  $\Delta' + 1$  colours. Therefore  $G$  contains a matching of size

$$\left\lceil \frac{e(G)}{\Delta' + 1} \right\rceil \geq \left\lceil \frac{(\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta'}{\Delta' + 1} \right\rceil \geq \ell + 2.$$

So (i) holds. Thus we may assume that there exists  $x \in V(G)$  with  $d(x) \geq \Delta'$ . Let  $G^- := G \setminus \{x\}$ . Then  $e(G^-) \geq e(G) - \Delta \geq (\ell - 2)\Delta + \Delta'$ . By induction,  $e(G^-)$  contains either a matching  $M^-$  of size  $\ell$  and  $uv \in E(G^-)$  with  $u \notin V(M^-)$ , or  $\ell - 1$  vertices of degree at least  $\Delta'$ . In the first case, choose  $y \in N(x) \setminus V(M^-)$  with  $y \neq u$  and let  $M := M^- \cup \{xy\}$ . Then (i) holds. In the second case,  $x$  is our  $\ell$ th vertex of degree at least  $\Delta'$  in  $G$ , so (ii) holds.

For the moreover part, suppose now that  $\ell \geq 1$  and  $e(G) \geq \ell\Delta + 1$ . Suppose that (i) does not hold. Let  $x_1, \dots, x_\ell$  be  $\ell$  distinct vertices of degree at least  $\Delta'$ . Then  $e(G \setminus \{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\}) \geq e(G) - \Delta\ell \geq 1$ . So  $G$  contains an edge  $e$  which is not incident to  $\{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\}$ . We obtain a contradiction by considering  $\{e, x_1z_1\} \cup \{x_1y_1, \dots, x_\ell y_\ell\}$ , where  $z_1 \in N(x_1)$  avoids  $e$  and for  $1 \leq i \leq \ell$  the vertices  $y_i \in N(x_i)$  are distinct, and avoid  $e, z_1$  and  $x_1, \dots, x_\ell$ .

Finally, if  $\ell = 0$ , then any two edges of  $G$  satisfy (i).  $\square$

Given an even matching  $M$  in  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  and a lower bound on  $e_G(A)$ , we would like to extend  $M$  into a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  using edges from  $G[A]$  so that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P})$  is large. Lemma 7.6 gives us two useful structures in  $G[A]$  from which we can choose suitable edges to add to  $M$  to form  $\mathcal{P}$ . The following proposition does this in the case when Lemma 7.6(i) holds.

**Proposition 7.7.** *Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $X, Y$ . Suppose that  $G[Y]$  contains a matching  $M'$  of size  $\ell + 1$  and an edge  $uv$  with  $u \notin V(M')$ . Let  $M$  be a non-empty even matching of size  $m$  in  $G[X, Y]$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that*

- (i)  $\mathcal{P}[X, Y] = M$  and  $\mathcal{P} \subseteq M \cup M' \cup \{uv\}$ ;
- (ii)  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(Y) = \ell + 1$ ;
- (iii)  $\mathcal{P}$  contains at least two  $XY$ -paths.

*Proof.* We will extend  $M$  by adding edges from  $M' \cup \{uv\}$ , so (i) automatically holds. Note that any path system  $\mathcal{P}$  obtained in this way contains an even number of  $XY$ -paths. So it suffices to find such a  $\mathcal{P}$  with at least one  $XY$ -path. If  $M \cup M'$  contains an  $XY$ -path, then we are done by setting  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M'$ . So suppose not. Then  $M'[V(M) \cap Y]$  is a perfect matching  $M''$ . If  $v \in V(M'')$ , let  $f$  be the edge of  $M''$  containing  $v$ . Otherwise, let  $f \in E(M'')$  be arbitrary. We take  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M' \cup \{uv\} \setminus \{f\}$ . Now both of the two edges in  $M$  which are incident to  $f$  lie in distinct  $XY$ -paths of  $\mathcal{P}$ , so (iii) holds. Clearly (ii) holds too.  $\square$

Following on from the previous proposition, we now consider how to extend  $M$  into  $\mathcal{P}$  when instead Lemma 7.6(ii) holds in  $G[A]$ .

**Proposition 7.8.** *Let  $\Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$  and let  $\ell, m, r \in \mathbb{N}_0$  with  $\Delta' \geq 3\ell + m$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $X, Y$  and let  $M$  be a matching in  $G[X, Y]$  of size  $m$ . Let  $\{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\} \subseteq Y$  such that  $d_Y(x_i) \geq \Delta'$  and  $|\{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\} \setminus V(M)| \geq r$ . Then there exists a path system  $\mathcal{P} \subseteq G[X, Y] \cup G[Y]$  such that  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(Y) = \ell + r$ ,  $\mathcal{P}[X, Y] = M$  and every edge of  $M$  lies in a distinct  $XY$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ .*

*Proof.* Since  $\Delta' \geq 3\ell + m$ ,  $G[Y]$  contains a collection of  $\ell$  vertex-disjoint paths  $P_1, \dots, P_\ell$  of length two with midpoints  $x_1, \dots, x_\ell$  respectively, such that  $V(P_i) \cap V(M) \subseteq \{x_i\}$ . For each  $x_i \in V(M)$ , delete one arbitrary edge from  $P_i$ . Let  $\mathcal{P}$  consist of  $M$  together with  $P_1, \dots, P_\ell$ . Then  $\mathcal{P}$  is a path system, and every edge of  $M$  lies in a distinct  $XY$ -path. Moreover,  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(Y) \geq 2\ell - (\ell - r) = \ell + r$ . Delete additional edges from  $\mathcal{P}[Y]$  if necessary.  $\square$

**Proposition 7.9.** *Let  $0 < \varepsilon < 1/3$ . Let  $a, b \in \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$  and let  $x \in \mathbb{N}_0$ . Suppose that  $2a + b \geq 2x$ . Let  $a' := \lceil a \rceil_\varepsilon$  and let  $b'$  be the largest even integer of size at most  $\lceil b \rceil_\varepsilon$ . Then  $a', b' \geq 0$  and  $2a' + b' \geq 2x$ .*

*Proof.* Note that

$$2\lceil a \rceil_\varepsilon + \lceil b \rceil_\varepsilon = 2\lceil a - \varepsilon \rceil + \lceil b - \varepsilon \rceil \geq \lceil 2a - 2\varepsilon + b - \varepsilon \rceil \geq \lceil 2x - 3\varepsilon \rceil \geq 2x.$$

This implies the proposition.  $\square$

**Proposition 7.10.** *Let  $D \in \mathbb{N}$  and let  $0 < \varepsilon < 1/3$ . Let  $G$  be a  $D$ -regular graph and let  $U, A, B$  be a partition of  $V(G)$  where  $|A| \geq |B|$ . Suppose that  $\Delta(G[A, U]), \Delta(G[A]) \leq D/2$  and that  $\text{char}_{D/2, \varepsilon}(G) = (\ell, m)$ . Then  $\ell, m \geq 0$  and  $\ell + m/2 \geq |A| - |B|$ .*

*Proof.* Proposition 4.7(ii) implies that  $4e(A)/D + 2e(A, U)/D \geq 2(|A| - |B|)$ . Apply Proposition 7.9 with  $2e(A)/D, 2e(A, U)/D, |A| - |B|$  playing the roles of  $a, b, x$  to obtain  $a', b'$ . Note that  $a' = \ell$  and  $b' = m$ .  $\square$

We will first prove Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$ . This constraint arises for the following reason. We will show that we can find a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $R_V(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour, but  $\mathcal{P}$  is ‘overbalanced’. More precisely,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$ , which is at least as large as  $|A| - |B|$  by Proposition 7.10. We would like to remove edges from  $\mathcal{P}$  so that (P2) holds, and  $R_V(\mathcal{P})$  is still an Euler tour. However, there exist path systems  $\mathcal{P}_0$  such that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 2$ ,  $R_V(\mathcal{P}_0)$  is an Euler tour, but any  $\mathcal{P}'_0$  with  $E(\mathcal{P}'_0) \subsetneq E(\mathcal{P}_0)$  is such that  $R_V(\mathcal{P}'_0)$  is not an Euler tour. (For example, a matching of size two in  $G[V_1, A]$  together with a matching of size two in  $G[V_2, A]$ , such that these edges are all vertex-disjoint.) So, if  $|A| - |B| < 2$ , we cannot guarantee, simply by removing edges, that we will ever be able to find  $\mathcal{P}'$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}') = |A| - |B|$  without violating (P3).

We will split the case when  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  further into the subcases  $m \geq 4$  and  $m \leq 2$ , i.e. when  $e_G(A, V_1 \cup V_2)$  is at least a little larger than  $3D/2$ , and when it is not. We will call these the *dense* and *sparse* cases respectively.

**7.5. The proof of Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  and  $m \geq 4$ .** This subsection concerns the dense case when  $m \geq 4$ , i.e. when  $e_G(A, V_1 \cup V_2)$  is at least slightly larger than  $3D/2$ . Now  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching  $M$  of size  $m$ . We will add edges to  $M$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  which satisfies (P1)–(P3). If  $M[A, V_i]$  is an even non-empty matching for both  $i = 1, 2$ , then  $M$  satisfies (P3). In every other case we must modify  $M$  by adding and/or subtracting edges. We do this separately depending on the relative values of  $e_M(A, V_1)$  and  $e_M(A, V_2)$ . We thus obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}_0$  which satisfies (P1) and (P3). Then we obtain  $\mathcal{P}$  by adding edges to  $\mathcal{P}_0$  from  $G[A]$  so that (P2) is also satisfied. We must pay attention to the way in which these sets of edges interact to ensure that  $\mathcal{P}$  still satisfies (P3).

We begin with the subcase when  $e_M(V_1, A), e_M(V_2, A)$  are both even and positive.

**Lemma 7.11.** *Let  $\Delta, \Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $\ell \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and  $m \in 2\mathbb{N}$  with  $\Delta'/\Delta, m/\Delta', \ell/\Delta' \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Let  $M$  be a matching in  $G[V_1 \cup V_2, A]$  of size  $m$ , and let  $M_i := M[V_i, A]$  and  $m_i := e(M_i)$ . Suppose that  $\{m_1, m_2\} \subseteq 2\mathbb{N}$ . Let  $e(A) \geq (\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta'$  and  $\Delta(G[A]) \leq \Delta$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $\mathcal{P} \subseteq G[A] \cup G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$ ,  $\mathcal{P}[A, V_1 \cup V_2] = M$ ,  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m$ ,  $R_V(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$ . Moreover,  $\mathcal{P}$  contains at least one  $V_i A$ -path for each  $i = 1, 2$ .*

*Proof.* We will find  $\mathcal{P}$  by adding suitable edges of  $G[A]$  to  $M$  such that  $\mathcal{P}$  contains at least one  $V_i A$ -path for each  $i = 1, 2$ . Then by Fact 7.2 we have that  $R_V(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour. Apply Lemma 7.6 to  $G[A]$ . Suppose first that Lemma 7.6(i) holds. Let  $M'$  be a matching of size  $\ell + 1$  in  $G[A]$  and let  $uv \in E(G[A])$  be such that  $u \notin V(M')$ . Then

$$(7.6) \quad \text{bal}_{AB}(M \cup M') = \ell + m/2 + 1 \quad \text{and} \quad e(M \cup M') = \ell + m + 1.$$



If  $M \cup M'$  contains a  $V_i A$ -path for both  $i = 1, 2$  we are done by setting  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M' \setminus \{e\}$  where  $e \in M'$  is arbitrary. Suppose now that  $M \cup M'$  contains a  $V_1 A$ -path but no  $V_2 A$ -path. Then  $V(M_2) \cap A \subseteq V(M')$ . Choose  $e_2 \in E(M')$  with an endpoint in  $V(M_2)$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M' \setminus \{e_2\}$  contains a  $V_i A$ -path for both  $i = 1, 2$ , and (7.6) implies that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$  and  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m$ , as required. The case when  $M \cup M'$  contains a  $V_2 A$ -path but no  $V_1 A$ -path is identical.

So we may assume that  $M \cup M'$  contains no  $V_i A$ -path for both  $i = 1, 2$ . Suppose that there is  $a_1 a_2 \in E(M')$  with  $a_i \in V(M_i)$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M' \setminus \{a_1 a_2\}$  contains a  $V_i A$ -path with endpoint  $a_i$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Moreover, (7.6) implies that  $\mathcal{P}$  satisfies the other conditions. Therefore we may assume that  $M'_i := M'[V(M_i) \cap A]$  is a (non-empty) perfect matching for  $i = 1, 2$ . Choose  $f_i \in E(M'_i)$  for  $i = 1, 2$  such that  $v \in V(f_1) \cup V(f_2)$  if possible. We set  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M' \cup \{uv\} \setminus \{f_1, f_2\}$ . Note that every vertex in  $V(f_i) \setminus \{v\}$  is the endpoint of a  $V_i A$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . Then (7.6) implies that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \text{bal}_{AB}(M \cup M') + 1 - 2 = \ell + m/2$  and  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m$ , as required.

Suppose instead that Lemma 7.6(ii) holds and let  $x_1, \dots, x_\ell$  be  $\ell$  distinct vertices in  $A$  with  $d_A(x_i) \geq \Delta'$  for all  $1 \leq i \leq \ell$ . Apply Proposition 7.8 with  $G \setminus B, V_1 \cup V_2, A, M, x_i, 0$  playing the roles of  $G, X, Y, M, x_i, r$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P} \subseteq G[A] \cup G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  with  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = \ell$ ,  $\mathcal{P}[A, V_1 \cup V_2] = M$  and such that every edge in  $M$  lies in a distinct  $AV_i$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$  for some  $i \in \{1, 2\}$ . Therefore  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour,  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m$ , and since  $V(\mathcal{P}) \cap B = \emptyset$  we have that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$ .  $\square$

We now consider the case when  $e_M(V_1, A), e_M(V_2, A)$  are both odd and at least three.

**Lemma 7.12.** *Let  $\Delta, \Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $\ell \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and  $m \in 2\mathbb{N}$  with  $\Delta'/\Delta, m/\Delta', \ell/\Delta' \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Let  $m < e_G(V_1 \cup V_2, A)$ ,  $e_G(A) \geq (\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta'$  and  $\Delta(G[A]) \leq \Delta$ . Let  $M$  be a matching in  $G[V_1 \cup V_2, A]$  of size  $m$ , and let  $M_i := M[V_i, A]$ ,  $m_i := e(M_i)$ . Suppose  $\{m_1, m_2\} \subseteq 2\mathbb{N} + 1$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell + m$ ,  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$ .*

*Proof.* We will find  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V_i, A) = e_{\mathcal{P}}(V_i, W)$  is even for  $i = 1, 2$ ,  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V_1, V_2) = 0$  and such that for each  $X \in \mathcal{V}$ , there exists  $X' \in \mathcal{V} \setminus \{X\}$  such that  $\mathcal{P}$  contains an  $XX'$ -path. Then by Fact 7.2 we have that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour.

Let us first suppose that  $\ell = 0$ . Since  $m < e_G(V_1 \cup V_2, A)$ , there exists an edge  $e^+ \in G[V_1 \cup V_2, A] \setminus E(M)$ . Suppose, without loss of generality, that  $e^+ \in G[V_1, A]$ . Let  $e^-$  be an arbitrary edge in  $M_2$ . Let  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup \{e^+\} \setminus \{e^-\}$ . Then  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = (m_1 + 1)/2 + (m_2 - 1)/2 = m/2$ , as required.

Therefore we assume that  $\ell \geq 1$ . Apply Lemma 7.6 to  $G[A]$ . Suppose first that Lemma 7.6(i) holds. So  $G[A]$  contains a matching  $M'$  of size  $\ell + 1$ . Note that it suffices to find  $e_i \in M_i$  for  $i = 1, 2$  such that  $M \cup M' \setminus \{e_1, e_2\}$  contains a  $V_i A$ -path for  $i = 1, 2$ . Then it is straightforward to check that we are done by setting  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup M' \setminus \{e_1, e_2\}$ .

We say that  $xy \in E(G[A])$  is a *connecting edge* if  $x \in V(M_1)$  and  $y \in V(M_2)$ . Suppose that  $M'$  contains no connecting edge. So  $M \cup M'$  contains no  $V_1 V_2$ -paths. But an even number of edges in  $M_i$  lie in  $V_i V_i$ -paths of  $M \cup M'$ . Since  $m_i$  is odd, there must be a  $V_i A$ -path  $P_i$  in  $M \cup M'$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . We are done by choosing  $e_i \in E(M_i) \setminus E(P_i)$  arbitrarily.

Therefore we may assume that there exists a connecting edge  $a_1 a_2 \in M'$ , with  $a_i \in V(M_i)$ . Suppose that there exists a second connecting edge  $a'_1 a'_2 \in M'$ , with  $a'_i \in V(M_i)$ . Then we are done by choosing  $e_1 \in M_1$  with endpoint  $a_1$  and  $e_2 \in M_2$  with endpoint  $a'_2$ . Therefore we may suppose that  $a_1 a_2$  is the only connecting edge in  $G$ . Let  $P$  be the  $V_1 V_2$ -path containing  $a_1 a_2$ . Let  $\mathcal{P}' := (M \cup M') \setminus \{E(P)\}$ . Then, for each  $i = 1, 2$ , either  $\mathcal{P}'$  contains a  $V_i A$ -path  $P_{i,A}$ , or a  $V_i V_i$ -path  $P_{i,i}$ . In the first case, let  $e_i$  be an arbitrary edge of  $M_i$  that does not lie in  $P_{i,A}$ . In the second case, let  $e_i \in E(P_{i,i}) \cap E(M_i)$  be arbitrary.

Suppose instead that Lemma 7.6(ii) holds in  $G[A]$  and let  $x_1, \dots, x_\ell$  be  $\ell$  distinct vertices in  $A$  with  $d_A(x_i) \geq \Delta'$  for all  $1 \leq i \leq \ell$ . Since  $\ell \geq 1$ , we can choose  $e_1 \in M_1$  and  $e_2 \in M_2$  so that  $\{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\} \not\subseteq V(M \setminus \{e_1, e_2\})$ . Apply Proposition 7.8 with  $G \setminus B, V_1 \cup V_2, A, M \setminus \{e_1, e_2\}, x_i, 1$

playing the roles of  $G, X, Y, M, x_i, r$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P} \subseteq G[A] \cup G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  such that  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = \ell + 1$ ,  $\mathcal{P}[A, V_1 \cup V_2] = M \setminus \{e_1, e_2\}$ , and every edge in  $M \setminus \{e_1, e_2\}$  lies in a distinct  $AV_i$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$  for some  $i \in \{1, 2\}$ . Then  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m - 1$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + 1 + (m - 2)/2 = \ell + m/2$ . Since  $\mathcal{P}[A, V_i]$  is an even matching for  $i = 1, 2$  and  $\mathcal{P}[V_1, V_2]$  is empty, we have that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour and we are done.  $\square$

We now consider the case when  $e_M(V_2, A)$  is odd and at least three, and  $e_M(V_1, A) = 1$ .

**Lemma 7.13.** *Let  $\Delta, \Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $\ell \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and  $m \in 2\mathbb{N}$  with  $\Delta'/\Delta, m/\Delta', \ell/\Delta' \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Let  $e_G(A) \geq (\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta'$  and  $\Delta(G[A]) \leq \Delta$ . Let  $M_2$  be a matching in  $G[V_2, A]$  of size  $m - 1$  where  $3 \leq m - 1 < e_G(V_2, A)$  and let  $e_1 \in G[V_1, A]$  be an edge not incident to  $M_2$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell + m + 2$ ,  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$ .*

*Proof.* We will find a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that, for each  $X \in \mathcal{V}$ ,  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(X, \overline{X})$  is even and there exists  $X' \in \mathcal{V} \setminus \{X\}$  such that  $\mathcal{P}$  contains an  $XX'$ -path. Then by Fact 7.2,  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour. We will choose  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $\mathcal{P}[V_1 \cup V_2, W]$  is obtained from  $M_2 \cup \{e_1\}$  by adding/removing at most one edge. Since  $G$  is 3-connected,  $G$  contains an edge  $v_1v$  with  $v_1 \in V_1$  and  $v \in V_2 \cup A \cup B$  such that  $vv_1$  and  $e_1$  are vertex-disjoint. We consider cases depending on the location of  $v$ .

**Case 1.**  $v \in A$ .

If possible, let  $e_2$  be the edge of  $M_2$  incident to  $v$ ; otherwise, let  $e_2$  be an arbitrary edge of  $M_2$ . Then we are done by applying Lemma 7.11 with  $M_2 \cup \{e_1, v_1v\} \setminus \{e_2\}$  playing the role of  $M$ .

**Case 2.**  $v \in V_2$ .

If possible, choose  $e_2 \in E(M_2)$  whose endpoint  $v_2 \in V_2$  satisfies  $v_2 = v$ , otherwise let  $e_2 \in E(M_2)$  be arbitrary. Set  $V'_1 := V_1 \cup \{v, v_2\}$  and  $V'_2 := V_2 \setminus \{v, v_2\}$ . Observe that  $e_{M_2 \cup \{e_1\}}(A, V'_i) \in 2\mathbb{N}$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Let  $\mathcal{V}' := \{V'_1, V'_2, W\}$ . Apply Lemma 7.11 with  $G \setminus \{v_1\}$ ,  $V'_1, V'_2, A, B, M_2 \cup \{e_1\}$  playing the roles of  $G, V_1, V_2, A, B, M$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  such that  $\mathcal{P}' \subseteq G[A] \cup G[A, V'_1 \cup V'_2]$ ,  $\mathcal{P}'[A, V'_1 \cup V'_2] = M_2 \cup \{e_1\}$ ,  $e(\mathcal{P}') = \ell + m$ ,  $R_{\mathcal{V}'}(\mathcal{P}')$  is an Euler tour and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}') = \ell + m/2$ . Moreover,  $\mathcal{P}'$  contains at least one  $V'_iA$ -path for each  $i = 1, 2$ . Let  $P_i$  be such a path.

Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}' \cup \{vv_1\}$ . Then  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m + 1$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$ . Moreover, each of  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V_1, \overline{V_1}) = e_{\mathcal{P}'}(V'_1, \overline{V'_1}) = 2$ ,  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V_2, \overline{V_2}) = e_{\mathcal{P}'}(V'_2, \overline{V'_2}) + 2$  and  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(W, \overline{W}) = e_{\mathcal{P}'}(W, \overline{W})$  is even. Now  $P_2$  is a  $V_2A$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . Similarly, if  $P_1$  avoids  $e_2$ , then  $P_1$  is a  $V_1A$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . If  $P_1$  contains  $e_2$  and  $v_2 = v$ , then  $v_1vP_1$  is a  $V_1A$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . If  $v_2 \neq v$  then  $v_1v$  is a  $V_1V_2$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . Therefore, by Fact 7.2,  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour, as required.

**Case 3.**  $v \in B$ .

Apply Lemma 7.6 to  $G[A]$ . Suppose first that Lemma 7.6(i) holds. Let  $M'$  be a matching of size  $\ell + 1$  in  $G[A]$  and let  $uw \in E(G[A])$  with  $u \notin V(M')$ . Apply Proposition 7.7 with  $G \setminus B, V_1 \cup V_2, A, M_2 \cup \{e_1\}, M', u, w$  playing the roles of  $G, X, Y, M, M', u, v$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}_0$  such that  $\mathcal{P}_0[V_1 \cup V_2, A] = M_2 \cup \{e_1\}$ ;  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) = \ell + 1$ ; and  $\mathcal{P}_0$  contains at least two  $(V_1 \cup V_2)A$ -paths. But  $\mathcal{P}_0$  contains at most one  $V_1A$ -path, and hence at least one  $V_2A$ -path  $P$ . Now Proposition 7.7(i) implies that  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V_2, A) = 1$ . So we can choose  $e \in E(\mathcal{P}_0[V_2, A]) \setminus E(P)$ . Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{v_1v\} \setminus \{e\}$ . Then  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(X, \overline{X})$  is even for all  $X \in \{V_1, V_2, W\}$  and  $\mathcal{P}$  contains a  $V_1B$ -path and a  $V_2A$ -path. Moreover,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) + e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A, V_1 \cup V_2)/2 - 1 = \ell + m/2$ , as required.

Suppose instead that Lemma 7.6(ii) holds. Then  $G[A]$  contains  $\ell$  distinct vertices  $x_1, \dots, x_{\ell}$  such that  $d_A(x_i) \geq \Delta'$  for all  $1 \leq i \leq \ell$ . Choose  $e \in E(G[V_2, A]) \setminus E(M_2)$ . If  $\ell = 0$  then  $\mathcal{P} := M_2 \cup \{e_1, v_1v, e\}$  is as required. Suppose now that  $\ell = 1$ . Let  $w_1, y_1 \in N_A(x_1) \setminus V(M_2 \cup \{e_1\})$  be distinct. Suppose that  $x_1 \notin V(e_1)$ . If possible, choose  $e_2$  to be the edge of  $M_2$  that contains  $x_1$ ; otherwise, let  $e_2$  be an arbitrary edge of  $M_2$ . In this case we let  $\mathcal{P} := M_2 \cup \{e_1, v_1v, w_1x_1y_1\} \setminus \{e_2\}$ . Suppose now that  $x_1 \in V(e_1)$ . In this case we let  $\mathcal{P} := M_2 \cup \{e_1, v_1v, e\} \cup \{x_1y_1\}$ . In all cases, we have that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour,  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell + m + 2$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = m/2 + 1$ , as required.

Suppose finally that  $\ell \geq 2$ . Then we can choose  $e_2 \in M_2$  so that  $\{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\} \not\subseteq V(M_2 \cup \{e_1\} \setminus \{e_2\})$ . Apply Proposition 7.8 with  $G \setminus B, V_1 \cup V_2, A, M_2 \cup \{e_1\} \setminus \{e_2\}, x_i, 1$  playing the roles of  $G, X, Y, M, x_i, r$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}_0$  in  $G[A] \cup G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  such that  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) = \ell + 1$ ,  $\mathcal{P}_0[A, V_1 \cup V_2] = M_2 \cup \{e_1\} \setminus \{e_2\}$ , and every edge in  $M_2 \cup \{e_1\} \setminus \{e_2\}$  lies in a distinct  $AV_i$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}_0$  for some  $i \in \{1, 2\}$ . Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{v_1v\}$ . Then  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m + 1$  and

$$\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) + e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A, V_1 \cup V_2)/2 - 1/2 = \ell + 1 + (m - 1)/2 - 1/2 = \ell + m/2.$$

Note finally that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour by Fact 7.2.  $\square$

We are now ready to prove a more general version of Lemmas 7.11–7.13 in which  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains an arbitrary even matching of size at least four.

**Lemma 7.14.** *Let  $\Delta, \Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$ ,  $\ell \in \mathbb{N}_0$  and  $m \in 2\mathbb{N}$  with  $\Delta'/\Delta, m/\Delta', \ell/\Delta' \ll 1$  and  $m \geq 4$ . Let  $\Delta'/\Delta < \varepsilon < 1/3$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Suppose that  $\Delta(G[A]), \Delta(G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]) \leq \Delta$  and  $\text{char}_{\Delta, \varepsilon}(G) = (\ell, m)$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell + m + 4$ ,  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$ .*

*Proof.* Write  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$ . Proposition 7.5 implies that

$$(7.7) \quad e_G(A) \geq (\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta' \quad \text{and} \quad e_G(A, U) \geq (m - 1)\Delta + \Delta'.$$

Recall also that  $m \leq \lceil e_G(A, U)/\Delta \rceil$  and  $m$  is even. Choose non-negative integers  $b_1, b_2$  such that  $b_i \leq \lceil e_G(A, V_i)/\Delta \rceil$  for  $i = 1, 2$  and  $b_1 + b_2 = m$ . Apply Lemma 6.7 with  $G[A, U], A, V_1, V_2$  playing the roles of  $G, U, V, W$  to obtain a matching  $M$  in  $G[A, U]$  such that  $e_M(A, V_i) = b_i$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Without loss of generality we assume that  $b_1 \leq b_2$ . Suppose first that  $b_1, b_2$  are both even and positive. Then we are done by applying Lemma 7.11. If  $b_1, b_2$  are both odd and at least three, then we are done by applying Lemma 7.12. Suppose that  $b_1 = 1$ . Then  $\lceil e_G(A, V_2)/\Delta \rceil \geq b_2 = m - 1$  so  $m - 1 < e_G(A, V_2)$ . Therefore we can apply Lemma 7.13 with  $M$  playing the role of  $M_2 \cup \{e_1\}$ . So we can assume that  $b_1 = 0$ , and hence that  $M \subseteq G[A, V_2]$ . Suppose that  $e_G(A, V_1) > 0$ . Then there is an edge  $e \in E(G[A, V_1])$  and  $m - 1$  edges in  $M$  which are not incident with  $e$ . We are similarly done by applying Lemma 7.13. The only remaining case is when  $e_G(A, V_1) = 0$ . Now (7.7) implies that

$$(7.8) \quad e_G(A, V_2) \geq (m - 1)\Delta + \Delta'.$$

Since  $G$  is 3-connected,  $G[V_1, \overline{V_1}]$  contains a matching of size three. So  $G[V_1, V_2 \cup B]$  contains a matching of size three. Then at least one of  $G[V_1, V_2]$ ,  $G[V_1, B]$  contains a matching of size two.

**Case 1.**  $G[V_1, V_2]$  contains a matching  $M^*$  of size two.

Choose two distinct edges  $e_2, e'_2 \in E(M)$  such that  $|V(M^*) \cap \{v_2, v'_2\}|$  is as large as possible, where  $v_2, v'_2$  are the endvertices of  $e_2, e'_2$  in  $V_2$ . Set  $V'_1 := V_1 \cup \{v_2, v'_2\}$  and  $V'_2 := V_2 \setminus \{v_2, v'_2\}$ . Observe that  $e_M(A, V'_i) \in 2\mathbb{N}$  for  $i = 1, 2$  since  $m \geq 4$ . Let  $\mathcal{V}' := \{V'_1, V'_2, W\}$ . Apply Lemma 7.11 with  $G, V'_1, V'_2, A, B, M$  playing the roles of  $G, V_1, V_2, A, B, M$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  such that  $\mathcal{P}' \subseteq G[A] \cup G[A, V'_1 \cup V'_2]$ ,  $\mathcal{P}'[A, V'_1 \cup V'_2] = M$ ,  $e(\mathcal{P}') = \ell + m$ ,  $R_{\mathcal{V}'}(\mathcal{P}')$  is an Euler tour and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}') = \ell + m/2$ . Moreover,  $\mathcal{P}'$  contains at least one  $V'_i A$ -path for each  $i = 1, 2$ . Let  $P_i$  be such a path. Then  $P_1$  contains either  $e_2$  or  $e'_2$ . Without loss of generality we may assume that  $P_1$  contains  $e_2$ .

Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}' \cup M^*$ . Then  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m + 2$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$ . Moreover, each of  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V_1, \overline{V_1}) = e_{\mathcal{P}'}(V'_1, \overline{V'_1}) = 2$ ,  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(V_2, \overline{V_2}) = e_{\mathcal{P}'}(V'_2, \overline{V'_2}) + 4$  and  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(W, \overline{W}) = e_{\mathcal{P}'}(W, \overline{W})$  is even. Now  $P_2$  is an  $V_2 A$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . If  $M^*$  contains an edge  $e$  which avoids both  $v_2, v'_2$  (and thus is vertex-disjoint from all edges in  $M$ ), then  $e$  is a  $V_1 V_2$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . If there is no such edge  $e$ , then  $M^*$  contains an edge  $e'$  whose endvertex in  $V_2$  is  $v_2$ . Then  $e' \cup P_1$  is a  $V_1 A$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . Therefore, by Fact 7.2,  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour, as required.

**Case 2.**  $G[V_1, B]$  contains a matching  $M^*$  of size two.

Apply Lemma 7.6 to  $G[A]$ . Suppose first that Lemma 7.6(i) holds. Then  $G[A]$  contains a matching  $M'$  of size  $\ell + 1$  and an edge  $uv$  with  $u \notin V(M')$ . Apply Proposition 7.7 with  $G \setminus B, V_1 \cup V_2, A, M, M', u, v$  playing the roles of  $G, X, Y, M, M', u, v$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}_0$  such that  $\mathcal{P}_0[V_1 \cup V_2, A] = M$ ;  $\mathcal{P}_0 \subseteq M \cup M' \cup \{uv\}$ ;  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) = \ell + 1$ ; and  $\mathcal{P}_0$  contains at least two  $V_2A$ -paths. Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup M^*$ . Then  $\mathcal{P}$  contains at least two  $V_2A$ -paths and two  $V_1B$ -paths (namely the edges of  $M^*$ ), so  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour. Moreover  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2$  and  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m + 3$ , as required.

Suppose now that Lemma 7.6(ii) holds in  $G[A]$ . Assume first that  $\ell \geq 2$ . Let  $x_1, \dots, x_\ell$  be  $\ell$  distinct vertices in  $A$  such that  $d_A(x_i) \geq \Delta'$  for  $1 \leq i \leq \ell$ . Since  $m \geq 4$ , we can choose distinct  $e_1, e_2 \in M$  such that  $|\{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\} \setminus V(M \setminus \{e_1, e_2\})| \geq 2$ . Then Proposition 7.8 applied with  $G \setminus B, V_1 \cup V_2, A, M \setminus \{e_1, e_2\}, x_i, 2$  playing the roles of  $G, X, Y, M, x_i, r$  implies that there is a path system  $\mathcal{P}' \subseteq G[A] \cup G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  such that  $e_{\mathcal{P}'}(A) = \ell + 2$ ,  $\mathcal{P}'[A, V_1 \cup V_2] = M \setminus \{e_1, e_2\}$ , and such that every edge of  $M \setminus \{e_1, e_2\}$  lies in a distinct  $AV_2$ -path. Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}' \cup M^*$ . Then  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour,  $e(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m + 2$ , and

$$\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = e_{\mathcal{P}'}(A) + e_{\mathcal{P}'}(A, V_1 \cup V_2)/2 - 1 = \ell + 2 + (m - 2)/2 - 1 = \ell + m/2.$$

Finally we consider the case when  $\ell \leq 1$ . Lemma 7.6 applied to  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  and (7.8) imply that  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching  $M'$  of size  $m$  together with a matching  $M^+$  of size two which is edge-disjoint from  $M'$ , such that both edges in  $M^+$  contain a vertex outside of  $V(M')$ . Since  $e_G(A, V_1) = 0$  by our assumption, we have  $M' \cup M^+ \subseteq G[A, V_2]$ . Suppose first that  $\ell = 0$ . In this case we let  $\mathcal{P} := M' \cup M^+ \cup M^*$ . It is clear that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour,  $e(\mathcal{P}) = m + 4$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = m/2$ , as required. The final case is when  $\ell = 1$ . Choose  $e \in M^+$  and  $e' \in M'$  such that  $|V(e) \cap \{x_1\}| + |V(e') \cap \{x_1\}|$  is maximal. So  $\mathcal{P}' := M' \cup M^+ \setminus \{e, e'\}$  is a matching of size  $m - 1$  together with an extra edge, and  $x_1 \notin V(\mathcal{P}')$ . In particular,  $\mathcal{P}'$  contains a  $V_2A$ -path  $P_2$ . Since  $m/\Delta' \ll 1$ , we can choose distinct vertices  $w_1, y_1$  in  $N_A(x_1) \setminus V(\mathcal{P}')$ . Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}' \cup M^* \cup \{w_1x_1y_1\}$ . Then  $P_2$  is a  $V_2A$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$  and each edge of  $M^*$  is a  $V_1B$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}$ . So Fact 7.2 implies that  $\mathcal{P}$  is an Euler tour. Moreover,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = m/2 + 1$ , and  $e(\mathcal{P}) = m + 4$ , as required.  $\square$

The proof of Lemma 7.3 in the ‘dense’ case is now just a short step away.

*Proof of Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  and  $m \geq 4$ .* Let  $\Delta := D/2$ . Observe that  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$  for all  $a \in A$  implies that  $\Delta(G[A]) \leq \Delta$ . Proposition 7.10 implies that  $\ell + m/2 \geq |A| - |B|$ . Choose non-negative integers  $\ell' \leq \ell$  and  $m' \leq m$  such that  $m'$  is even,  $\ell' + m'/2 = |A| - |B|$  and  $m' \geq 4$ . This is possible since  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$ . Let  $\Delta' := \nu n$ . Proposition 7.4 implies that  $\ell', m' \leq 12\rho n$ . Then  $\Delta'/\Delta \ll 1$ ,  $m'/\Delta' \ll 1$ ,  $\ell'/\Delta' \ll 1$ ,  $\Delta'/\Delta < \varepsilon$ . Apply Lemma 7.14 with  $\ell', m'$  playing the roles of  $\ell, m$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell' + m' + 4 \leq \ell + m + 4$ ,  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour, and  $\text{bal}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell' + m'/2 = |A| - |B|$ . So (P1)–(P3) hold.  $\square$

**7.6. The proof of Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  and  $m \leq 2$ .** We now deal with the sparse case, i.e. when the largest even matching we can guarantee between  $A$  and  $V_1 \cup V_2$  has size at most two. For this, we need to introduce some notation which will be used in all of the remaining cases.

**7.6.1. More notation and tools.** Given a path system  $\mathcal{P}$ , recall the definition of  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A)$  in (4.1). We say that  $\mathcal{P}$  is a *basic connector* (for  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ ) if

- (BC1)  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour;
- (BC2)  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq 4$  and  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P})| \leq 2$ ;
- (BC3)  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(A \cup B) = 0$ ;
- (BC4) if  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = (a_1, a_2)$  then  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) \in \{a_1 + 2a_2 - 2, a_1 + 2a_2 - 1\}$  and  $a_2 \leq 1$ .

It can be shown that (BC1)–(BC3) imply (BC4) (cf. the proof of Proposition 7.15). Observe (BC3) implies that if  $\mathcal{P}$  is a basic connector, then

$$(7.9) \quad 2\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = e_{\mathcal{P}}(A, V_1 \cup V_2) - e_{\mathcal{P}}(B, V_1 \cup V_2) = a_1 + 2a_2 - e_{\mathcal{P}}(B, V_1 \cup V_2).$$

Roughly speaking, the existence of a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}$  follows from 3-connectivity. We would like to modify/extend  $\mathcal{P}$  into a path system  $\mathcal{P}'$  which balances the sizes of  $A, B$ , i.e. for which  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}') = |A| - |B|$ . The following notion will be very useful for this. Given a graph  $G$ , disjoint  $A_1, A_2 \subseteq V(G)$  and  $t \in \mathbb{N}_0$ , we say that

$$\text{acc}(G; A_1, A_2) \geq t$$

if  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that

- (A1)  $e(\mathcal{P}) = t$ ;
- (A2)  $d_{\mathcal{P}}(x_2) = 0$  for each  $x_2 \in A_2$ ;
- (A3)  $d_{\mathcal{P}}(x_1) \leq 1$  for each  $x_1 \in A_1$ , and no path of  $\mathcal{P}$  has both endpoints in  $A_1$ .

We say that such a  $\mathcal{P}$  *accommodates*  $A_1, A_2$ .

In a typical application of this notion, we have already constructed a path system  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . We let  $A_1$  be the set of all those vertices in  $A$  which have degree one in  $\mathcal{P}_0$  and  $A_2$  be the set of all those vertices in  $A$  which have degree two in  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . Then, if  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq t$ , we can find a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  in  $G[A]$  with  $t$  edges such that  $\mathcal{P}_0 \cup \mathcal{P}$  is also a path system.

We now collect some tools which will be used to prove Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  and  $m \leq 2$ . The next proposition uses Lemma 4.8 to show that  $G$  contains a basic connector.

**Proposition 7.15.** *Let  $G$  be a 3-connected graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Then  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}$ .*

*Proof.* Apply Lemma 4.8 to  $G$  and  $\mathcal{V}$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  satisfying the conditions (i)–(iii). We claim that  $\mathcal{P}$  is a basic connector. Write  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = (a_1, a_2)$  and  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(B) = (b_1, b_2)$ . In particular, (iii) implies that

$$(7.10) \quad a_1 + b_1 + 2(a_2 + b_2) \in \{2, 4\}$$

and  $a_2 + b_2 \leq 1$ . Note that (BC1) and (BC3) are immediate from (ii) and (i) respectively. Moreover, (i) implies  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(A \cup B) = 0$ . So  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(A, V_1 \cup V_2) = a_1 + 2a_2$  and  $e_{\mathcal{P}}(B, V_1 \cup V_2) = b_1 + 2b_2$ . So (7.10) implies that

$$2\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = a_1 + 2a_2 - b_1 - 2b_2 \in \{2a_1 + 4a_2 - 4, 2a_1 + 4a_2 - 2\}$$

and  $|2\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P})| \leq 4$ , so (BC2) and (BC4) hold.  $\square$

By Proposition 7.15, we can find a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  in  $G$ , which may not satisfy (P2). Our aim now is to find a suitable path system  $\mathcal{P}_A$  in  $G[A]$  so that  $\mathcal{P}_0 \cup \mathcal{P}_A$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Let  $A_i$  be the collection of all those vertices of  $A$  with degree  $i$  in  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . The next result shows that it suffices to show that  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq |A| - |B| - \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)$ .

**Proposition 7.16.** *Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Let  $\mathcal{P}_0$  be a basic connector in  $G$  and for  $i = 1, 2$  let  $A_i$  be the collection of all those vertices of  $A$  with degree  $i$  in  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . Then, for any integer  $0 \leq t \leq \text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2)$ , we have that  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) + t$  and  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq t + 4$ .*

*Proof.* Let  $\mathcal{P}_A$  be a path system in  $G[A]$  which accommodates  $A_1, A_2$  such that  $e(\mathcal{P}_A) = t$ . Let  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \mathcal{P}_A$ . Properties (A2) and (A3) imply that  $\mathcal{P}$  is a path system. It is straightforward to check that (BC1) implies that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour. Moreover,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) + e(\mathcal{P}_A)$ , as required. Finally, (BC2) gives the required bound on  $e(\mathcal{P})$ .  $\square$

**7.6.2. Building a basic connector from a matching.** The next lemma shows that in the case when  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching of size at least three, we can obtain a basic connector with additional useful properties.

**Lemma 7.17.** *Let  $G$  be a 3-connected graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Suppose that  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching  $M$  of size three. Then one of the following holds:*

- (i)  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) \geq 1$ , and if  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = (a_1, a_2)$ , then  $a_1 \geq 2$ ;
- (ii)  $e_G(A, V_i) = 0$  for some  $i \in \{1, 2\}$ , and for each  $a \in A$ ,  $G$  contains matchings  $M_{a,A}, M_{a,B}$  in  $G[A \setminus \{a\}, V_j], G[B, V_i]$  respectively, where  $j \in \{1, 2\} \setminus \{i\}$ , each of which has size two. In particular,  $\mathcal{P}_a := M_{a,A} \cup M_{a,B}$  is a basic connector with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_a) = 0$ ,  $a \notin V(\mathcal{P}_a)$  and  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = (2, 0)$ .

*Proof.* Without loss of generality we may assume that  $e_M(A, V_2) \geq e_M(A, V_1)$ . Suppose first that  $e_G(A, V_1) > 0$ . We claim that  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching  $M'$  of size three such that  $e_{M'}(A, V_1) = 1$  and  $e_{M'}(A, V_2) = 2$ . To see this, we may assume that we cannot set  $M' := M$ , so  $M \subseteq G[A, V_2]$ . Let  $e_1 \in E(G[A, V_1])$ . Then  $V(e_1) \cap V(M) \subseteq A$ . If possible, let  $e'$  be the edge of  $M$  incident to  $e_1$ , otherwise let  $e' \in E(M)$  be arbitrary. Let  $M' := M \cup \{e_1\} \setminus \{e'\}$ , proving the claim.

Since  $G$  is 3-connected, there exists  $e \in E(G[V_1, \overline{V_1}])$  that is not incident with the unique edge  $e_1 \in M'[A, V_1]$ . Let  $x$  be the endpoint of  $e$  that does not lie in  $V_1$ . If  $x \in V_2$  then we can choose  $e_2 \in M'[A, V_2]$  which is not incident with  $e$  and then  $\mathcal{P} := \{e, e_1, e_2\}$  is a path system with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = 1$  and  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = (2, 0)$ . It is easy to check that  $\mathcal{P}$  is a basic connector, so (i) holds. If  $x \in A \cup B$  then similarly  $\mathcal{P} := M' \cup \{e\}$  satisfies (i).

Suppose now that  $e_G(A, V_1) = 0$ . Thus  $e_M(A, V_2) = 3$ . Since  $G$  is 3-connected, there is a matching  $M'$  of size three in  $G[V_1, \overline{V_1}]$ . Let  $E(M') = \{e_1, e_2, e_3\}$  and let  $x_1, x_2, x_3$  respectively be the endpoints of  $e_1, e_2, e_3$  which do not lie in  $V_1$ . Note that  $\{x_1, x_2, x_3\} \subseteq B \cup V_2$ . Suppose first that  $|V(M') \cap B| \leq 1$ . Without loss of generality we assume that  $\{x_1, x_2\} \subseteq V_2$ . Let  $e, e' \in E(M)$  be such that  $\{x_1, x_2\} \not\subseteq V(\{e, e'\})$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \{e, e', e_1, e_2\}$  is such that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = 1$  and  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = (2, 0)$ . Moreover,  $\mathcal{P}$  is a basic connector, so (i) holds. So without loss of generality we may assume that  $|V(M') \cap B| \geq 2$  and  $\{x_1, x_2\} \subseteq B$ . Given an arbitrary  $a \in A$ , choose  $e, e' \in E(M)$  such that  $a \notin V(\{e, e'\})$ . Let  $M_{a,A} := \{e, e'\}$  and  $M_{a,B} := \{e_1, e_2\}$ . So (ii) holds.  $\square$

We now show how this result implies that, whenever  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching of size two, we are again able to find a basic connector with additional useful properties (though not as useful as those in Lemma 7.17).

**Lemma 7.18.** *Let  $G$  be a 3-connected graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Let  $M$  be a matching in  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  of size two. Then  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) \geq 0$ , and if  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = (a_1, a_2)$ , then  $a_1 \geq 1$ .*

*Proof.* Write  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$ . Since  $G$  is 3-connected,  $G[A \cup B, U]$  contains a matching  $M'$  of size three. We claim that  $M \cup M'$  contains a matching  $M^*$  of size three such that at least two of the edges in  $M^*$  lie in  $G[A, U]$ . To see this, assume that  $e_{M'}(A, U) \leq 1$  (or we could take  $M^* := M'$ ). Assume further that there is no edge  $e \in E(M')$  without an endpoint in  $V(M)$  (or we could take  $M^* := M \cup \{e\}$ ). Then, if we write  $M := \{au, a'u'\}$  where  $a, a' \in A$  and  $u, u' \in U$ , we have that  $M'$  consists of distinct edges  $e_u, e_{u'}, e$  incident with  $u, u'$  and  $\{a, a'\}$  respectively. Suppose that  $a \in V(e)$ . Then  $e \in E(G[A, U])$  and so  $e_u, e_{u'} \in E(G[B, U])$ . Moreover, neither  $e$  nor  $e_u$  is incident with  $a'u'$ . We can set  $M^* := \{a'u', e, e_u\}$ . If instead  $a' \in V(e)$ , then we can set  $M^* := \{au, e, e_{u'}\}$ . This proves the claim.

If  $M^* \subseteq G[A, U]$ , we are done by Lemma 7.17. Otherwise, let  $bu$  be the unique edge in  $M^*[B, U]$  with  $u \in U$  and  $b \in B$ . Let  $A' := A \cup \{b\}$  and  $B' := B \setminus \{b\}$ . Apply Lemma 7.17 with  $G, M^*, A', B'$  playing the roles of  $G, M, A, B$ . Suppose first that (i) holds. Then  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}$  with  $\text{bal}_{A'B'}(\mathcal{P}) \geq 1$ . But  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \text{bal}_{A'B'}(\mathcal{P}) - d_{\mathcal{P}}(b)$  if  $b \in V(\mathcal{P})$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \text{bal}_{A'B'}(\mathcal{P})$  otherwise. If  $d_{\mathcal{P}}(b) = 1$  then  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) \geq 0$ , as required. Suppose that  $d_{\mathcal{P}}(b) = 2$ . Write  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A') = (a'_1, a'_2)$ . Thus  $a'_2 = 1$  by (BC4). Moreover, Lemma 7.17(i) implies that  $a'_1 \geq 2$ . Now  $a'_1 + 2a'_2 \leq \text{bal}_{A'B'}(\mathcal{P}) + 2 \leq 4$  by (BC2) and (BC4), so  $(a'_1, a'_2) = (2, 1)$  and  $\text{bal}_{A'B'}(\mathcal{P}) = 2$ . Then  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) \geq 0$ , as required. Let  $F_{\mathcal{P}}(A) = (a_1, a_2)$ . As above,  $(a_1, a_2) \in \{(a'_1 - 1, a'_2), (a'_1, a'_2 - 1), (a'_1, a'_2)\}$ . So  $a_1 \geq a'_1 - 1 \geq 1$  by Lemma 7.17(i). Suppose instead that Lemma 7.17(ii) holds. The ‘in particular’ part implies that  $G$  contains a basic connector

$\mathcal{P}_b$  with  $\text{bal}_{A'B'}(\mathcal{P}_b) = 0$ ,  $F_{\mathcal{P}_b}(A) = (2, 0)$  and  $b \notin V(\mathcal{P}_b)$ . Then  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_b) = \text{bal}_{A'B'}(\mathcal{P}_b)$ , and  $F_{\mathcal{P}_b}(A) = F_{\mathcal{P}_b}(A')$  as required.  $\square$

**7.6.3. Accommodating path systems.** The following proposition gives a lower bound for  $\text{acc}(G; A_1, A_2)$  whenever  $G$  contains several vertices of degree much larger than  $|A_1| + |A_2|$  (i.e. when Lemma 7.6(ii) holds in  $G$ ).

**Proposition 7.19.** *Let  $\Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$  and let  $\ell, a_1, a_2 \in \mathbb{N}_0$  be such that  $\Delta' \geq 3\ell + a_1 + a_2$ . Let  $G$  be a graph and let  $X$  be a collection of  $\ell$  vertices in  $G$  such that  $d_G(x) \geq \Delta'$  for all  $x \in X$ . Then for all disjoint  $A_1, A_2 \subseteq V(G)$  with  $|A_i| = a_i$  for  $i = 1, 2$ , we have*

$$\text{acc}(G; A_1, A_2) \geq 2\ell - |X \cap A_1| - 2|X \cap A_2|.$$

*Proof.* Write  $X := \{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\}$ . Since  $\Delta' \geq 3\ell + a_1 + a_2$  we can choose distinct vertices  $w_1, \dots, w_\ell, y_1, \dots, y_\ell$  such that  $\{w_i, y_i\} \subseteq N(x_i) \setminus (A_1 \cup A_2 \cup X)$ . For each  $1 \leq i \leq \ell$ , define

$$(7.11) \quad P_i := \begin{cases} x_i y_i & \text{if } x_i \in A_1; \\ \emptyset & \text{if } x_i \in A_2; \\ w_i x_i y_i & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Then  $\mathcal{P} := \bigcup_{1 \leq i \leq \ell} P_i$  is a path system which accommodates  $A_1, A_2$ . Clearly

$$(7.12) \quad \text{acc}(G; A_1, A_2) \geq e(\mathcal{P}) = 2\ell - |X \cap A_1| - 2|X \cap A_2|,$$

as required.  $\square$

The following proposition shows that, if  $A$  contains a collection  $X$  of vertices of high degree and  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  which does not interact too much with  $X$ , then we can extend  $\mathcal{P}_0$  such that it still induces an Euler tour but  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)$  has increased.

**Proposition 7.20.** *Let  $\Delta' \in \mathbb{N}$  and let  $\ell, r \in \mathbb{N}_0$  be such that  $\Delta' \geq 3\ell + 4$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$  and let  $\mathcal{P}_0$  be a basic connector in  $G$ . For  $i = 1, 2$ , let  $A_i$  be the collection of all those vertices in  $A$  with degree  $i$  in  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . Let  $X := \{x_1, \dots, x_\ell\} \subseteq A$  where  $d_A(x_i) \geq \Delta'$  for all  $1 \leq i \leq \ell$ . Suppose that  $X \cap A_2 = \emptyset$  and  $|X \setminus A_1| \geq r$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) + \ell + r$  and  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell + r + 4$ .*

*Proof.* Write  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) := (a_1, a_2)$ . So  $|A_i| = a_i$  and hence  $a_1 + a_2 = |V(\mathcal{P}_0) \cap A| \leq 4$  by (BC2) and (BC3). Therefore we can apply Proposition 7.19 to see that

$$\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq 2\ell - |X \cap A_1| - 2|X \cap A_2| \geq 2\ell - (\ell - r) = \ell + r.$$

Then Proposition 7.16 implies that there exists a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  as required.  $\square$

The following lemma gives lower bounds for  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2)$ . Together with Proposition 7.16, this will enable us to see ‘how far’ we can extend a basic connector. We show that  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2)$  is ‘sufficiently large’ unless we are in one of two special cases.

**Lemma 7.21.** *Let  $k \in \{0, 1\}$ ,  $\Delta, \Delta', \ell \in \mathbb{N}$  be such that  $\ell + k \geq 2$ . Suppose that  $\Delta'/\Delta, \ell/\Delta' \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a graph with vertex partition  $U, A$  and suppose that  $e_G(A) \geq (\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta'$  and  $\Delta(G[A]), \Delta(G[A, U]) \leq \Delta$ . Let  $a_1, a_2 \in \mathbb{N}_0$  with  $a_1 \geq k$  and  $\Delta' \geq 3\ell + a_1 + a_2$ . Let  $A_1, A_2 \subseteq A$  be disjoint such that  $|A_i| = a_i$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Then one of the following holds.*

- (I)  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell - a_1 - 2a_2 + k + 2$ ;
- (II)  $k = 1$ ,  $(a_1, a_2) = (1, 0)$  and  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell + 1$ ;
- (III)  $k = 1$ ,  $1 \leq \ell$ ,  $a_1 + a_2 \leq 2$ ,  $e_G(A) \leq \ell\Delta$  and  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell - a_2$ . Moreover, let  $X := \{x \in A : d_A(x) \geq \Delta'\}$ . Then  $|X| = \ell$  and all edges of  $G[A]$  are incident with  $X$ .

*Proof.* Apply Lemma 7.6 to  $G[A]$ . Suppose first that (i) holds. Let  $M$  be a matching in  $G[A]$  of size  $\ell + 1$  and let  $uv \in E(G[A])$  be such that  $u \notin V(M)$ . Obtain  $M'$  from  $M$  by deleting all those edges with both endpoints in  $A_1$  or at least one endpoint in  $A_2$ . Then  $M'$  accommodates  $A_1, A_2$  by construction, so

$$(7.13) \quad \text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq e(M') \geq \ell + 1 - \lfloor a_1/2 \rfloor - a_2.$$

If  $\lceil a_1/2 \rceil + a_2 \geq k + 1$ , then (7.13) implies that (I) holds.

So suppose instead that  $\lceil a_1/2 \rceil + a_2 \leq k$ . First consider the case  $k = 0$ . Then  $\lceil a_1/2 \rceil + a_2 = 0$  and hence  $(a_1, a_2) = (0, 0)$ . Now  $A_1 = A_2 = \emptyset$ , so  $M \cup \{uv\}$  is a path system which accommodates  $A_1, A_2$ , and  $e(M \cup \{uv\}) = \ell + 2$ , so (I) holds.

Now consider the case  $k = 1$ . We have  $\lceil a_1/2 \rceil + a_2 \leq 1$ . But  $a_1 \geq k \geq 1$  so  $(a_1, a_2) = (1, 0)$ . Observe that  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell + 1$  by (7.13). So (II) holds.

Suppose now that Lemma 7.6(i) does not hold in  $G[A]$ . Since  $\ell \geq 1$ , we have  $e_G(A) \leq \ell\Delta$  by the final assertion in Lemma 7.6. Let  $X := \{x \in A : d_A(x) \geq \Delta\}$ . Then  $|X| \geq \ell$ . Since Lemma 7.6(i) does not hold, we must have that  $|X| = \ell$  and that all edges of  $G[A]$  are incident with  $X$ .

Apply Proposition 7.19 to see that

$$(7.14) \quad \begin{aligned} \text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) &\geq 2\ell - |X \cap A_1| - 2|X \cap A_2| \geq 2\ell - \min\{a_1, \ell - a_2\} - 2a_2 \\ &= \ell - a_1 - 2a_2 + \max\{\ell, a_1 + a_2\} \geq \ell - a_2. \end{aligned}$$

In particular, if  $\max\{\ell, a_1 + a_2\} \geq k + 2$ , (7.14) implies that (I) holds. So we may suppose that  $\max\{\ell, a_1 + a_2\} \leq k + 1$ . Recall that  $k + \ell \geq 2$  and  $a_1 \geq k$  in the hypothesis. Hence, we have  $k = 1$  and so  $1 \leq \ell, a_1 + a_2 \leq 2$ . So (III) holds.  $\square$

We are now ready to prove Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  and  $m \leq 2$ . Roughly speaking, the approach is as follows. Proposition 7.15 implies that  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . When  $m = 2$ , Lemmas 7.17 and 7.18 allow us to assume that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)$  is non-negative. We would like to extend  $\mathcal{P}_0$  to a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  in such a way that  $R_V(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \ell + m/2 \geq |A| - |B|$ . Proposition 7.16 implies that, in order to do this, it suffices to find a path system  $\mathcal{P}_A$  in  $G[A]$  which accommodates  $A_1, A_2$  (where  $A_i$  is the collection of all those vertices in  $A$  with degree  $i$  in  $\mathcal{P}_0$ ) and has enough edges. Now Lemma 7.21 implies that we can do this unless  $m = 2$ ,  $\ell$  is small and  $(|A_1|, |A_2|)$  takes one of a small number of special values. Some additional arguments are required in these cases.

*Proof of Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| - |B| \geq 2$  and  $m \leq 2$ .* Let  $k := m/2$ . Since  $m \in 2\mathbb{N}_0$  we have  $k \in \{0, 1\}$ . Let  $\Delta := D/2$ ,  $\Delta' := \nu n$  and  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$ . Proposition 7.10 implies that

$$(7.15) \quad \ell + k \geq |A| - |B| \geq 2.$$

Proposition 7.4 implies that  $\ell, m \leq 12\rho n$ . Then  $\Delta'/\Delta, \ell/\Delta', m/\Delta' \ll 1$ ,  $\Delta'/\Delta \ll \varepsilon$ . Proposition 7.5 implies that

$$(7.16) \quad e_G(A) \geq (\ell - 1)\Delta + \Delta' \quad \text{and} \quad e_G(A, U) \geq (m - 1)\Delta + \Delta'.$$

By Proposition 7.15,  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . Further assume that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)$  is maximal, and given  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)$ ,  $a_1$  is maximal where  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) := (a_1, a_2)$ . Let

$$t := |A| - |B| - \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0).$$

Then (BC2) implies that  $t \geq 0$ . In fact we may assume that  $t \geq 1$  as otherwise  $\mathcal{P}_0$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). For  $i = 1, 2$  let  $A_i$  be the set of all those vertices in  $A$  which have degree  $i$  in  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . So  $|A_i| = a_i$ . Proposition 7.16 implies that, to prove Lemma 7.3, it suffices to show that

$$\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq t.$$

(To check (P1), note that (BC2) and (7.15) imply  $t \leq |A| - |B| + 2 \leq \ell + k + 2 \leq \ell + m + 2$ .)

**Claim A.**



- (i) Suppose that  $k = 1$ . Then  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \geq 0$ , and if  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 0$  then  $a_1 \geq 1$ .
- (ii)  $a_1 \geq k$ .

To prove Claim A(i), note that if  $k = 1$  (and so  $m = 2$ ), then (7.16) and Lemma 7.6 imply that  $G[A, U]$  contains a matching of size two. Together with Lemma 7.18 and our choice of  $\mathcal{P}_0$  this in turn implies Claim A(i). Claim A(ii) clearly holds if  $k = 0$ , so assume  $k = 1$ . If  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 2$ , then  $a_1 \geq 1$  by (BC4). Together with Claim A(i) this shows that we may assume that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 1$ . By (BC4), we may further assume that  $(a_1, a_2) = (0, 1)$ . Then (7.9) implies that  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, U) = 0$ . But then  $\mathcal{P}_0$  has no endpoints in  $W = A \cup B$ , contradicting (BC1). This completes the proof of Claim A.

Apply Lemma 7.21 with  $G \setminus B, A, U, F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A), \ell, k$  playing the roles of  $G, A, U, (a_1, a_2), \ell, k$ . Suppose first that (I) holds, so

$$\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell - a_1 - 2a_2 + k + 2 \stackrel{(\text{BC4}), (7.15)}{\geq} |A| - |B| - \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = t,$$

as required. Therefore we may assume that one of Lemma 7.21(II) or (III) holds. So  $k = 1$  and therefore  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \geq 0$  by Claim A(i). Suppose first that (II) holds. Then

$$\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell + 1 \stackrel{(7.15)}{\geq} |A| - |B| \geq t,$$

as required. Therefore we may assume that (III) holds. So  $1 \leq \ell, a_1 + a_2 \leq 2$ ,  $e_G(A) \leq \ell\Delta$  and  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell - a_2$ . Let  $X := \{x \in A : d_A(x) \geq \Delta'\}$ . Then Lemma 7.21(III) also implies that  $|X| = \ell$  and all edges of  $G[A]$  are incident with  $X$ .

We claim that we are done if  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \neq a_2$ . To see this, suppose first that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \leq a_2 - 1$ . Since  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \geq 0$  this implies that  $a_2 = 1$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 0$ . But  $a_1 \geq k \geq 1$  by Claim A(ii) and  $a_1 + a_2 \leq 2$ , so  $a_1 = a_2 = 1$ . This is a contradiction to (BC4). Suppose instead that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \geq a_2 + 1$ . Then

$$\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell - a_2 \geq \ell + 1 - \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = \ell + 1 - (|A| - |B|) + t \stackrel{(7.15)}{\geq} t.$$

Therefore we may assume that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = a_2$ . In particular, this together with (BC4) implies that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \in \{0, 1\}$ . We claim that we can further assume that

$$(7.17) \quad \ell = |A| - |B| - 1.$$

Indeed, to see this, note that by (7.15), it suffices to show that we are done if  $\ell \geq |A| - |B|$ . But in this case we have  $\text{acc}(G[A]; A_1, A_2) \geq \ell - a_2 \geq |A| - |B| - a_2 = t$ , as required.

We will now distinguish two cases.

**Case 1.**  $G[A, U]$  contains a matching of size three.

Recall that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \in \{0, 1\}$ . So Lemma 7.17 and our choice of  $\mathcal{P}_0$  imply that  $a_1 \geq 2$ . Since  $a_1 + a_2 \leq 2$  we have that  $(a_1, a_2) = (2, 0)$ . Therefore  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = a_2 = 0$ . Now, by Lemma 7.17 and our choice of  $\mathcal{P}_0$  we deduce that there is some  $i \in \{1, 2\}$  such that for  $j \in \{1, 2\} \setminus \{i\}$  and for each  $a \in A$ , there are matchings  $M_{a,A}, M_{a,B}$  in  $G[A \setminus \{a\}, V_i], G[B, V_j]$  respectively, each of which has size two. Moreover,  $\mathcal{P}_a := M_{a,A} \cup M_{a,B}$  is a basic connector with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_a) = 0$ .

Let  $x \in X$  be arbitrary. (Recall that  $|X| = \ell \geq 1$ .) Apply Proposition 7.20 with  $\mathcal{P}_x, V(M_{x,A}) \cap A, \emptyset, X, \ell, 1$  playing the roles of  $\mathcal{P}_0, A_1, A_2, X, \ell, r$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  in  $G$  such that  $R_V(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_x) + \ell + 1 = |A| - |B|$  (using (7.17)), and  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell + 5$ . Thus,  $\mathcal{P}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).

**Case 2.**  $G[A, U]$  does not contain a matching of size three.

Together with König's theorem on edge-colourings this implies that  $e_G(A, U) \leq 2\Delta$ .

**Claim B.**  $X \cap V(\mathcal{P}_0) = \emptyset$ .

Since  $e_G(A, U) \leq 2\Delta$ , Proposition 4.7(ii) implies that

$$e_G(A) \geq \Delta(|A| - |B|) - e_G(A, U)/2 \stackrel{(7.17)}{\geq} \ell\Delta.$$

In fact, equality holds since  $e_G(A) \leq \ell\Delta$  by Lemma 7.21(III). Since all edges of  $G[A]$  are incident with  $X$  and  $|X| = \ell$  it follows that  $d_A(x) = \Delta = D/2$  for all  $x \in X$ . For all  $x \in X$ ,  $d_U(x) = D - d_A(x) - d_B(x) \leq D - 2d_A(x) = D - 2\Delta = 0$ . The claim follows by (BC3).

Recall that we assume that  $t \geq 1$ . Observe that, since  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \in \{0, 1\}$ , the definition of  $t$  and (7.17) imply that  $1 \leq t \leq |A| - |B| = \ell + 1$ . Choose an arbitrary  $X' \subseteq X$  with  $|X'| = t - 1$ . Apply Proposition 7.20 with  $\mathcal{P}_0, X', t - 1, 1$  playing the roles of  $\mathcal{P}_0, X, \ell, r$  to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  in  $G$  such that  $R_{\mathcal{V}}(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) + t = |A| - |B|$ , and  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq \ell + 5$ . Thus,  $\mathcal{P}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).  $\square$

**7.7. The proof of Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| = |B| + 1$ .** Note that the extremal example in Figure 1(i) satisfies the conditions of this case. Therefore the degree bound  $D \geq n/4$  is essential here. We will follow a similar strategy as in Section 7.6. We first find a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  and then modify it to obtain a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  satisfying (P1)–(P3). To be more precise,  $\mathcal{P}$  will satisfy  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq 6$  and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = 1$ . Throughout this section, we will assume that the basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  is chosen so that  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) - 1|$  is minimal. We will distinguish cases depending on the value of  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)$ .

Let  $G$  be a  $D$ -regular graph with vertex partition  $A, B, U$  where  $|A| = |B| + 1$ . Then Proposition 4.7(i) implies that

$$(7.18) \quad 2e_G(A) + e_G(A, U) = 2e_G(B) + e_G(B, U) + D.$$

We will need the following simple facts for the case when  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)| = 2$ .

**Proposition 7.22.** *Let  $G$  be a 3-connected graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Then the following holds:*

- (i) *if  $\mathcal{P}_0$  is a basic connector in  $G$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 2$ , then  $V(\mathcal{P}_0) \cap B = \emptyset$  and  $\mathcal{P}_0[A, V_i]$  is a matching of size two for each  $i = 1, 2$ . In particular,  $\mathcal{P}_0[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching of size three.*
- (ii) *if  $e_G(B, U) > 0$  and  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}'_0$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}'_0) = 2$ , then  $G$  also contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 1$ ;*
- (iii) *if  $e_G(A, U) > 0$  then  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \geq -1$ ;*
- (iv) *if  $e_G(A, U), e_G(B, U) > 0$  then  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  with  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)| \leq 1$ .*

*Proof.* (i) follows immediately from (BC1)–(BC4). To prove (ii), note that by (i), for both  $i = 1, 2$  there are matchings  $M_i \subseteq G[A, V_i]$  of size two such that  $\mathcal{P}'_0 = M_1 \cup M_2$ . Let  $e \in E(G[B, U])$  be arbitrary. Without loss of generality, suppose that  $e \in E(G[B, V_1])$ . If possible, let  $e' \in E(M_1)$  be the edge incident with  $e$ ; otherwise let  $e' \in E(M_1)$  be arbitrary. Then  $\mathcal{P}_0 := (\mathcal{P}'_0 \cup \{e\}) \setminus \{e'\}$  is a basic connector with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 1$ , as required. (iii) and (iv) follow from Proposition 7.15 together with an argument similar to the one for (ii).  $\square$

The next lemma concerns the case when  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching of size three. This extra condition ensures the existence of a basic connector with useful properties of which we can take advantage.

**Lemma 7.23.** *Let  $n, D \in \mathbb{N}$  be such that  $D \geq n/4$  and  $1/n \ll 1$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ , where  $|V_i| \geq D/2$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . Suppose that  $|A| = |B| + 1$ , that  $\Delta(G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]) \leq D/2$  and that  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains a matching of size three. Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  which satisfies (P1)–(P3).*

*Proof.* Let  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$ . Without loss of generality we may assume that  $e_G(A, V_1) \leq e_G(A, V_2)$ . We will obtain  $\mathcal{P}$  by adding at most two edges to a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$ . Therefore  $e(\mathcal{P}) \leq 6$  so (P1) will hold. We may assume that there does not exist a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}'_0$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}'_0) = 1$  (otherwise we can take  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}'_0$ ). Apply Lemma 7.17 to obtain a basic connector in  $G$  which satisfies (i) or (ii).

**Case 1.** *Lemma 7.17(i) holds.*

So  $G$  contains a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  such that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \geq 1$  and, if  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) = (a_1, a_2)$ , then  $a_1 \geq 2$ . Thus  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 2$  by our assumption. Proposition 7.22(i) implies that  $V(\mathcal{P}_0) \cap B = \emptyset$ . Furthermore, Proposition 7.22(ii) implies that  $e_G(B, U) = 0$ . Suppose that  $e_G(B) \geq 1$ . For arbitrary  $e \in E(G[B])$  we have that  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). So we may assume that  $e_G(B) = 0$ . So (7.18) implies that

$$(7.19) \quad 2e_G(A) + e_G(A, U) = D.$$

Moreover, for each  $b \in B$  we have that  $N_G(b) \subseteq A$  and thus  $|A| \geq D$ . So  $|B| \geq D - 1$  and since  $D \geq n/4$  we have that  $|U| \leq 2D + 1$ . We will only prove the case when  $|V_1| = D - s$  for some  $s \in \mathbb{N}_0$ . (The same argument also works for  $|V_2| = D - s$ .) Recall that  $s \leq D/2$  by assumption. Then every vertex in  $V_1$  has at least  $s + 1$  neighbours in  $\overline{V_1}$ . Since  $e_G(B, U) = 0$  and  $e_G(A, V_1) \leq e_G(A, V_2)$  we have that

$$e_G(V_1, V_2) \geq e_G(V_1, \overline{V_1}) - e_G(A, V_1) \stackrel{(7.19)}{\geq} (s + 1)(D - s) - D/2 \geq D/2.$$

Suppose that  $\mathcal{P}_0$  is a matching of size four in  $G[A, U]$ . Then, given any  $e \in E(G[V_1, V_2])$ , we can choose  $e_i \in \mathcal{P}_0[A, V_i]$  such that  $e, e_1, e_2$  is a matching of size three. Otherwise, Proposition 7.22(i) implies that  $\mathcal{P}_0$  consists of vertex-disjoint paths  $u_1a_1, u_2a_2, v_1av_2$ , where  $v_i, u_i \in V_i$  and  $a, a_1, a_2 \in A$ . Since  $e_G(V_1, V_2) \geq 2$ , we can pick  $e \in E(G[V_1, V_2]) \setminus \{u_1u_2\}$ . It is easy to see that we can similarly find  $e_i \in E(\mathcal{P}_0[A, V_i])$  such that  $e, e_1, e_2$  is a matching of size three. In both cases,  $\mathcal{P} := \{e, e_1, e_2\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).

**Case 2.** *Lemma 7.17(ii) holds.*

Since  $e_G(A, V_1) \leq e_G(A, V_2)$  this implies that  $e_G(V_1, A) = 0$ . Moreover, Lemma 7.17(ii) also implies that, for each  $a \in A$ , there are matchings  $M_{a,A}, M_{a,B}$  in  $G[A \setminus \{a\}, V_2], G[B, V_1]$  respectively, each of which has size two. In particular  $e_G(B, U) \geq 2$ . Suppose that  $e_G(A) > 0$ . Let  $aa' \in E(G[A])$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := M_{a,A} \cup M_{a,B} \cup \{aa'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). So we may assume that  $e_G(A) = 0$ . Then (7.18) implies that  $e_G(A, V_2) = e_G(A, U) \geq D + e_G(B, U) \geq D + 2$ . The ‘moreover’ part of Lemma 7.6 with  $G[A, V_2], D/2, 2$  playing the roles of  $G, \Delta, \ell$  implies that  $G[A, V_2]$  contains a matching  $M_A$  of size three and an edge  $xy$  with  $x \notin V(M_A)$ . Let  $a \in A$  be arbitrary. Then  $\mathcal{P} := M_{a,B} \cup M_A \cup \{xy\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).  $\square$

The following proposition will be used to find edges in  $G[A]$  which can be added to a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  so that it is still a path system and  $R_V(\mathcal{P}_0)$  is still an Euler tour. For example, if  $a \in A$  is such that  $d_{\mathcal{P}_0}(a) = 2$ , then we cannot add any edges in  $G[A]$  which are incident with  $a$ . (Recall that the partition given in Lemma 7.3 satisfies  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$  for all  $a \in A$ .)

**Proposition 7.24.** *Let  $G$  be a  $D$ -regular graph with vertex partition  $A, B, U$  where  $|A| = |B| + 1$ . Let  $a \in A$  be such that  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$ . Then*

$$2e_G(A \setminus \{a\}) + e_G(A \setminus \{a\}, U) \geq e_G(B, U).$$

*Proof.* Note that

$$\begin{aligned}
2e_G(A \setminus \{a\}) + e_G(A \setminus \{a\}, U) &= 2e_G(A) + e_G(A, U) - 2d_A(a) - d_U(a) \\
&\geq 2e_G(A) + e_G(A, U) - d_A(a) - d_B(a) - d_U(a) \\
&= 2e_G(A) + e_G(A, U) - D \stackrel{(7.18)}{\geq} e_G(B, U),
\end{aligned}$$

as required.  $\square$

By Lemma 7.23, we may assume that  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  contains no matching of size three. Then Proposition 7.22(i) allows us to assume that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \leq 0$  (or we are done). In the next lemma, we consider the case when  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 0$ .

**Lemma 7.25.** *Let  $D \in \mathbb{N}$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Suppose that  $|A| = |B| + 1$ ,  $\Delta(G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]) \leq D/2$  and  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$  for all  $a \in A$ . Suppose further that  $G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]$  does not contain a matching of size three. Let  $\mathcal{P}_0$  be a basic connector in  $G$  with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 0$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  which satisfies (P1)–(P3).*

*Proof.* Let  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$ . Since  $G[A, U]$  does not contain a matching of size three, König's theorem on edge-colourings implies that

$$(7.20) \quad e_G(A, U) \leq D.$$

Property (BC4) implies that  $a_1 + 2a_2 \in \{1, 2\}$  and so  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) \in \{(2, 0), (1, 0), (0, 1)\}$ . We will distinguish cases based on the value of  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A)$ .

**Case 1.**  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) = (2, 0)$ .

Then (7.9) implies that  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A, U) = e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, U) = 2$ . Since  $\mathcal{P}_0$  is an Euler tour and  $e(\mathcal{P}_0) \leq 4$  by (BC1) and (BC2), there are distinct vertices  $a, a' \in A$ , a collection of distinct vertices  $X := \{u, u', v, v'\} \subseteq U$  with  $|X \cap V_i| = 2$  for  $i = 1, 2$  and  $b, b' \in B$  which are not necessarily distinct, such that  $\mathcal{P}_0 := \{au, a'u', bv, b'v'\}$ .

Observe that we are done if there exists  $e \in E(G[A]) \setminus \{aa'\}$  since then  $\mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). So we may assume that  $E(G[A]) \subseteq \{aa'\}$ . Now

$$2 = e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, U) \leq e_G(B, U) \stackrel{(7.20)}{\leq} 2e_G(B) + e_G(B, U) + D - e_G(A, U) \stackrel{(7.18)}{=} 2e_G(A) \leq 2.$$

Therefore we have  $e_G(B) = 0$ ,  $e_G(A) = 1$ ,  $e_G(A, U) = D$  and  $e_G(B, U) = 2$ , so  $E(G[B, U]) = \{bv, b'v'\}$  and  $E(G[A]) = \{aa'\}$ .

We will assume that either  $\{u, u'\} \subseteq V_1$  and  $\{v, v'\} \subseteq V_2$ ; or  $\{u, v\} \subseteq V_1$  and  $\{u', v'\} \subseteq V_2$  since the other cases are similar.

**Case 1.a.**  $\{u, u'\} \subseteq V_1$  and  $\{v, v'\} \subseteq V_2$ .

Suppose that  $e_G(V_1, V_2) \neq 0$ . Let  $v_1v_2 \in E(G[V_1, V_2])$  with  $v_i \in V_i$ . Choose  $e_1 \in \mathcal{P}_0[A, V_1 \setminus \{v_1\}]$  and  $e_2 \in \mathcal{P}_0[B, V_2 \setminus \{v_2\}]$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \{e_1, e_2, v_1v_2, aa'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Suppose that  $e_G(A, V_2) \neq 0$ . Let  $a''x_2 \in E(G[A, V_2])$  with  $a'' \in A$  and  $x_2 \in V_2$ . Choose  $e_2 \in \mathcal{P}_0[B, V_2 \setminus \{x_2\}]$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \{au, a'u', a''x_2, e_2\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Therefore  $e_G(A \cup V_1, V_2) = 0$ . So  $E(G[V_2, \overline{V_2}]) = \{bv, b'v'\}$ , contradicting the 3-connectivity of  $G$ .

**Case 1.b.**  $\{u, v\} \subseteq V_1$  and  $\{u', v'\} \subseteq V_2$ .

We may assume that  $b = b'$  since otherwise  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{aa'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Since  $G[A, U]$  does not contain a matching of size three, every edge in  $G[A, U]$  is incident with at least one of  $a, a', u, u'$ . Suppose that there exists  $a'' \in A \setminus \{a, a'\}$  such that  $ua'' \in E(G)$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{ua'', aa'\} \setminus \{ua\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). A similar deduction can be made with  $u'$  playing the role of  $u$ . Therefore every edge in  $G[A, U]$  is incident with  $a$  or  $a'$ . Since  $e_G(A, U) = D$  we have  $d_U(a), d_U(a') = D/2$ .

Suppose that  $e_G(V_1, V_2) \neq 0$ . Let  $v_1 v_2 \in E(G[V_1, V_2])$  with  $v_i \in V_i$ . If  $v_1 \neq u$  and  $v_2 \neq u'$  then  $\mathcal{P} := \{au, a'u', v_1 v_2\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Therefore we may suppose, without loss of generality, that  $v_1 = u$ . Suppose that  $v_2 \neq u'$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \{a'u', v_1 v_2, bv, aa'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Therefore we may suppose that  $v_2 = u$ . Thus  $uu' \in E(G)$ . Since  $d_U(a) \geq D/2$ , we can choose  $w \in N_U(a) \setminus \{v, v', u, u'\}$ . Suppose that  $w \in V_1$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \{aw, uu', aa', bv'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). If  $w \in V_2$  then  $\mathcal{P} := \{aw, uu', aa', bv\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).

Thus we may assume that  $e_G(V_1, V_2) = 0$ . Choose  $Y_a \in \{V_1, V_2\}$  such that  $d_{Y_a}(a) \geq D/4$ . Note that there is always such a  $Y_a$ . Define  $Y_{a'}$  analogously. Suppose that  $Y_{a'} = V_1$ . Choose  $w' \in N_{V_1}(a') \setminus \{u, v\}$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{a'w'\} \setminus \{bv\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). We can argue similarly if  $Y_a = V_2$ .

Therefore we may assume that  $Y_{a'} = V_2$  and  $Y_a = V_1$ . Suppose that  $d_{V_1}(a') \neq 0$ . Let  $w' \in N_{V_1}(a')$ . Since  $d_{V_1}(a) \geq D/4$ , we can choose  $w \in N_{V_1}(a) \setminus \{w'\}$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{aw, a'w'\} \setminus \{au, bv\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). So  $d_{V_1}(a') = 0$ . Since every edge of  $G[A, U]$  is incident with  $a$  or  $a'$ , we have that every edge in  $G[A, V_1]$  is incident with  $a$ . We have shown that every edge in  $G[V_1, \overline{V_1}]$  is incident with  $a$  or  $b$ , contradicting the 3-connectivity of  $G$ .

**Case 2.**  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) = (1, 0)$ .

Then (7.9) implies that  $e_G(B, U) \geq e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, U) = 1$ . So (7.18) and (7.20) give  $2e_G(A) = D + 2e_G(B) + e_G(B, U) - e_G(A, U) \geq 1$ . Let  $e \in E(G[A])$  be arbitrary. Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).

**Case 3.**  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) = (0, 1)$ .

Now (7.9) implies that  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, U) = e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A, U) = 2$ . So (BC2) implies that  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(V_1, V_2) = 0$  and that there exist distinct  $v_i, u_i \in V_i$  for  $i = 1, 2$ , and  $b, b' \in B$  and  $a \in A$  such that  $\mathcal{P}_0 = \{v_1 b, v_2 b', u_1 a u_2\}$ . Proposition 7.24 implies that  $2e_G(A \setminus \{a\}) + e_G(A \setminus \{a\}, U) \geq 2$ . Suppose first that  $e_G(A \setminus \{a\}) \geq 1$ . Choose  $e \in E(G[A \setminus \{a\}])$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Therefore we may assume that  $e_G(A \setminus \{a\}, U) \geq 2$ . Suppose there exists  $e' \in E(G[A \setminus \{a\}, U \setminus \{u_1, u_2\}])$ . Without loss of generality, suppose that  $e'$  has an endpoint in  $V_1$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e'\} \setminus \{v_1 b\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Therefore we may assume that  $G$  contains an edge  $a'u_1$  where  $a' \in A \setminus \{a\}$ . Let  $\mathcal{P}'_0 := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{a'u_1\} \setminus \{au_1\}$ . Then  $\mathcal{P}'_0$  is a basic connector with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}'_0) = 0$  and  $F_{\mathcal{P}'_0}(A) = (2, 0)$ . So we are in Case 1.  $\square$

The next lemma concerns the case when  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = -1$ .

**Lemma 7.26.** *Let  $D \in \mathbb{N}$  where  $D \geq 12$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph with vertex partition  $\mathcal{V} = \{V_1, V_2, W := A \cup B\}$ . Suppose that  $|A| = |B| + 1$ ,  $\Delta(G[A, V_1 \cup V_2]) \leq D/2$  and  $d_A(a) \leq d_B(a)$  for all  $a \in A$ . Let  $\mathcal{P}_0$  be a basic connector in  $G$  such that  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) - 1|$  is minimal. Suppose that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = -1$ . Then  $G$  contains a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  which satisfies (P1)–(P3).*

*Proof.* Let  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$ . Observe that  $G[A, U]$  does not contain a matching of size two since otherwise Lemma 7.18 would imply that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \geq 0$ . Therefore  $e_G(A, U) \leq D/2$ , and so (7.18) implies that

$$(7.21) \quad e_G(A) \geq D/4.$$

Write  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) := (a_1, a_2)$ . Then (BC4) implies that  $a_1 + 2a_2 \in \{0, 1\}$ . So  $(a_1, a_2) \in \{(0, 0), (1, 0)\}$ . Suppose first that  $(a_1, a_2) = (0, 0)$ . Then by (7.21), we can choose distinct  $e, e' \in E(G[A])$ . In this case  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e, e'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).

Now suppose that  $(a_1, a_2) = (1, 0)$ . Then (7.9) implies that

$$(7.22) \quad e_G(B, U) \geq e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, U) = 3.$$

Let  $au$  be the single edge in  $\mathcal{P}_0[A, U]$ , where  $a \in A$  and  $u \in U$ . Note that any edge in  $E(G[A \setminus \{a\}, U])$  is incident with  $u$  since  $G[A, U]$  contains no matching of size two. So  $e_G(A \setminus \{a\}, U) =$

$d_{A \setminus \{a\}}(u)$ . Thus Proposition 7.24 and (7.22) imply that

$$(7.23) \quad 2e_G(A \setminus \{a\}) + d_{A \setminus \{a\}}(u) \geq 3.$$

Suppose first that  $d_A(a) \leq 1$ . In this case, (7.21) implies that  $e_G(A \setminus \{a\}) \geq D/4 - 1 \geq 2$ . Let  $e, e' \in E(G[A \setminus \{a\}])$  be distinct. Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e, e'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).

Now suppose that  $d_A(a) \geq 2$ . Let  $a', a'' \in N_A(a)$  be distinct. Suppose that  $e_G(A \setminus \{a\}) \neq 0$ . Then we can choose  $e \in E(G[A \setminus \{a\}])$ , and  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{aa', e\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Suppose instead that  $e_G(A \setminus \{a\}) = 0$ . Then  $d_{A \setminus \{a\}}(u) \geq 3$  by (7.23), so there exists  $a^* \in A \setminus \{a, a', a''\}$  such that  $ua^* \in E(G[A, U])$ . We have that  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{ua^*, a'aa''\} \setminus \{ua\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).  $\square$

We are now ready to combine the preceding lemmas to prove Lemma 7.3 fully in the case when  $|A| = |B| + 1$ .

*Proof of Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| = |B| + 1$ .* Let  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$ . Suppose first that  $G[A, U]$  contains a matching of size three. Then we are done by Lemma 7.23, so assume not. Proposition 7.15 implies that  $G$  contains a basic connector. Choose a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  in  $G$  such that  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) - 1|$  is minimal. Recall that (BC2) implies  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)| \leq 2$ . Since  $G[A, U]$  does not contain a matching of size three, Proposition 7.22(i) implies that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \leq 1$ . We may assume that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \leq 0$  or we are done. Lemmas 7.25 and 7.26 prove the lemma in the case when  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 0, -1$  respectively. So we may assume that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = -2$ . Thus, by (7.9), we have  $e_G(B, U) \geq 4$ . Moreover, by Proposition 7.22(iii) we may assume that  $e_G(A, U) = 0$ . Now (7.18) implies  $e_G(A) \geq D/2 + 2$ . The ‘moreover’ part of Lemma 7.6 with  $G[A], D/2, 1$  playing the roles of  $G, \Delta, \ell$  implies that  $G[A]$  contains a matching  $M_A$  of size two and an edge  $aa'$  with  $a \notin V(M_A)$ . So  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup M_A \cup \{aa'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3).  $\square$

**7.8. The proof of Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| = |B|$ .** In this subsection we consider the only remaining case of Lemma 7.3: when the bipartite vertex classes  $A$  and  $B$  have equal size. Our aim is to find a path system  $\mathcal{P}$  such that  $R_V(\mathcal{P})$  is an Euler tour, and  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}) = 0$ . As in the previous section, we will appropriately modify a basic connector guaranteed by Proposition 7.15. The degree bound  $D \geq n/4$  is used again here.

*Proof of Lemma 7.3 in the case when  $|A| = |B|$ .* Let  $U := V_1 \cup V_2$ . Proposition 4.7(i) implies that

$$(7.24) \quad 2e_G(A) + e_G(A, U) = 2e_G(B) + e_G(B, U).$$

Proposition 7.15 implies that  $G$  contains a basic connector. Choose a basic connector  $\mathcal{P}_0$  in  $G$  such that  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)|$  is minimal. Write  $F_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A) := (a_1, a_2)$ .

Suppose first that  $e_G(B, U) = 0$ . Then

$$2\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \stackrel{(7.9)}{=} a_1 + 2a_2 = e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A, U) \leq e_G(A, U) \stackrel{(7.24)}{\leq} 2e_G(B).$$

(In particular,  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) \geq 0$ .) Let  $E' \subseteq E(G[B])$  be a collection of  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)$  distinct edges (so  $|E'| \leq 2$  by (BC2)). Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup E'$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Thus we may assume that  $e_G(B, U) \geq 1$  and a similar argument allows us to assume that  $e_G(A, U) \geq 1$ .

Together with the 3-connectivity of  $G$ , this implies that  $G[W, U]$  contains a matching  $M$  of size two such that one edge is incident with  $A$  and one edge is incident with  $B$ . Proposition 7.22(iv) and our choice of  $\mathcal{P}_0$  together imply that  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)| \leq 1$ . Without loss of generality we suppose that  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = -1$  (otherwise  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 1$  and we could swap  $A$  and  $B$ , or  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0) = 0$  and we are done by taking  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0$ ). Then (BC4) implies that  $(a_1, a_2) \in \{(0, 0), (1, 0)\}$ . If  $e_G(A) \geq 1$  then, for any  $e \in E(G[A])$  we have that  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). So we may assume that

$$(7.25) \quad e_G(A) = 0.$$

**Claim 1.**  $G[A, U]$  does not contain a matching of size two.

To prove the claim, suppose not. We will show that if  $G[A, U]$  contains a matching of size two, then the minimality of  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)|$  will be contradicted. First consider the case when  $(a_1, a_2) = (1, 0)$ . So  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A, U) = 1$  and therefore  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, U) = 3$  by (7.9). But (BC2) implies that  $e(\mathcal{P}_0) \leq 4$ , so  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(V_1, V_2) = 0$ . Now by (BC1) we have that  $|V(\mathcal{P}_0) \cap V_i| = 2$  for  $i = 1, 2$ , and  $d_{\mathcal{P}_0}(v) = 1$  for all  $v \in V(\mathcal{P}_0) \cap V_i$ . In particular,  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(V_i, B) > 0$  for both  $i = 1, 2$ . Let  $e$  be the single edge in  $\mathcal{P}_0[A, U]$ . Without loss of generality, we may assume that  $G[A, U]$  contains an edge  $e'$  which is vertex-disjoint from  $e$ . (Otherwise,  $G[A, U]$  contains a matching  $av, a'v'$  such that  $e = av'$ . Then  $\mathcal{P}'_0 := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{a'v'\} \setminus \{e\}$  is a basic connector with  $\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}'_0) = \text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)$  and  $a'v'$  is the single edge in  $\mathcal{P}'_0[A, U]$ ; and  $av$  is an edge which is vertex-disjoint from  $a'v'$ .) Suppose first that  $e'$  has an endpoint in  $V_1$ . If possible, choose  $f \in E(\mathcal{P}_0[V_1, B])$  which is incident with  $e'$ ; otherwise let  $f \in E(\mathcal{P}_0[V_1, B])$  be arbitrary. Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e'\} \setminus \{f\}$  contradicts the minimality of  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)|$ . The case when  $e'$  has an endpoint in  $V_2$  is similar.

Suppose now that  $(a_1, a_2) = (0, 0)$ . Then  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(A, U) = 0$  and hence  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, U) = 2$ . Moreover,  $\mathcal{P}_0[B, U]$  is a matching  $e, e'$  since  $\mathcal{P}_0$  is an Euler tour by (BC1). Now  $d_{R_V(\mathcal{P}_0)}(V_i) \geq 2$  for  $i = 1, 2$ , so  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(V_1, V_2) \geq 1$ . But (BC2) implies that  $e(\mathcal{P}_0) \leq 4$ , so  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(V_1, V_2) \leq 2$ . Suppose that  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(V_1, V_2) = 1$  and let  $f \in E(\mathcal{P}_0[V_1, V_2])$ . Then  $\mathcal{P}_0 = \{e, e', f\}$  is a matching of size three. Moreover  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(B, V_i) = 1$  for  $i = 1, 2$ . If there exists  $e_A \in E(G[A, U] \setminus V(f))$  then we can replace one of  $e, e'$  by  $e_A$  to contradict the minimality of  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)|$ . Therefore there is a matching  $\{e_A, e'_A\} \subseteq E(G[A, U])$  such that both  $e_A, e'_A$  are incident to  $V(f)$ . Then they are vertex-disjoint from  $\{e, e'\}$ , so  $\mathcal{P} := \{e, e', e_A, e'_A\}$  contradicts the minimality of  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)|$ . Suppose now that  $e_{\mathcal{P}_0}(V_1, V_2) = 2$ . Then  $\mathcal{P}_0[B, U] \subseteq G[B, V_i]$  for some  $i = 1, 2$ . Without loss of generality we assume that  $i = 2$ . Suppose that there exists  $e_A \in E(G[A, V_1])$ . Choose  $f \in E(\mathcal{P}_0[V_1, V_2])$  that is not incident to  $e_A$ . Choose  $e_B \in E(\mathcal{P}_0[B, V_2])$  that is not incident to  $f$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := \{e_A, f, e_B\}$  contradicts the minimality of  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)|$ . Therefore we may assume that there is a matching  $M_A \subseteq G[A, V_2]$  of size two. There is at least one  $V_1V_2$ -path in  $\mathcal{P}_0$  (which consists of a single edge  $f'$ ). Choose  $e \in M_A$  which is not incident to  $f'$ . If possible, let  $e_B$  be the edge of  $\mathcal{P}_0[B, V_2]$  which is incident to  $e$ ; otherwise let  $e_B \in E(\mathcal{P}_0[B, V_2])$  be arbitrary. Then  $\mathcal{P} := \mathcal{P}_0 \cup \{e\} \setminus \{e_B\}$  contradicts the minimality of  $|\text{bal}_{AB}(\mathcal{P}_0)|$ . This completes the proof of the claim.

Therefore  $e_G(A, U) \leq D/2$  since  $\Delta(G[A, U]) \leq D/2$ . So (7.24) and (7.25) together imply that

$$(7.26) \quad e_G(W, U) = e_G(B, U) - e_G(A, U) + 2e_G(A, U) \leq D.$$

Suppose first that  $|A| = |B| = D - k$  for some  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ . Then (7.25) implies that, for all  $a \in A$ , we have  $d_U(a) = D - d_A(a) - d_B(a) \geq D - |B| = k$ . So  $e_G(A, U) \geq k|A| = k(D - k) \geq D - 1$ , a contradiction. So  $|A| = |B| \geq D$  and hence  $|U| = n - |A| - |B| \leq n - 2D \leq 2D$  since  $D \geq n/4$ .

**Claim 2.** *There exists a matching  $M'$  of size three in  $G[V_1, V_2]$ .*

To prove the claim, assume without loss of generality that  $|V_1| \leq |V_2|$ . Then there exists  $s \in \mathbb{N}_0$  such that  $|V_1| = D - s$ . Recall from our assumption in Lemma 7.3 that  $|V_1| \geq D/2$ . Suppose first that  $s \geq 2$ . Then

$$(7.27) \quad \begin{aligned} e_G(V_1, V_2) &\geq D|V_1| - e_G(U, W) - 2 \binom{|V_1|}{2} \stackrel{(7.26)}{\geq} |V_1|(D - |V_1| + 1) - D \\ &\geq \min\{D^2/4 - D/2, 2D - 6\} \geq D + 1. \end{aligned}$$

Recall that  $d_{V_i}(x_i) \geq d_{V_j}(x_i)$  for all  $x_i \in V_i$  and  $\{i, j\} = \{1, 2\}$ . So  $\Delta(G[V_1, V_2]) \leq D/2$ . Therefore we are done by König's theorem on edge-colourings.

Thus we may assume that  $s \in \{0, 1\}$ . Let  $H := G[V_1, V_2]$ . Suppose that  $H$  contains no matching of size three. By König's theorem on vertex covers,  $H$  contains a vertex cover  $\{v_i, v_j\}$  where  $v_i \in V_i$ ,  $v_j \in V_j$  and  $i, j$  are not necessarily distinct. So  $e(H) \leq d_H(v_i) + d_H(v_j)$ . Note that the complement

$\overline{G}$  of  $G$  satisfies

$$\begin{aligned}
 e_{\overline{G}}(V_1) + e_{\overline{G}}(V_2) &\geq d_{\overline{G}[V_1]}(v_i) + d_{\overline{G}[V_2]}(v_j) - 1 = |V_i| - d_{V_i}(v_i) + |V_j| - d_{V_j}(v_j) - 3 \\
 &\geq D - d_{V_i}(v_i) + D - d_{V_j}(v_j) - 5 \geq d_H(v_i) + d_H(v_j) - 5 \\
 (7.28) \quad &\geq e(H) - 5.
 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore by counting the degrees in  $G$  of the vertices in  $U$ , we have that

$$\begin{aligned}
 e_G(U, W) &= \sum_{v \in V_1} d_G(v) + \sum_{v \in V_2} d_G(v) - 2e(H) - 2e_G(V_1) - 2e_G(V_2) \\
 &= D(|V_1| + |V_2|) - 2e(H) - 2\left(\binom{|V_1|}{2} - e_{\overline{G}}(V_1) + \binom{|V_2|}{2} - e_{\overline{G}}(V_2)\right) \\
 (7.28) \quad &\geq D(|V_1| + |V_2|) - 10 - 2\binom{|V_1|}{2} - 2\binom{|V_2|}{2} \\
 &= |V_1|(D - |V_1|) + |V_2|(D - |V_2|) + |V_1| + |V_2| - 10 \geq 2D - 14,
 \end{aligned}$$

a contradiction to (7.26). This proves the claim.

Recall that  $M$  is a matching of size two in  $G[W, U]$  with one edge incident to  $A$  and one edge incident to  $B$ . Assume without loss of generality that  $e_M(V_2, W) \geq e_M(V_1, W)$ . There exists  $e \in E(M')$  which is vertex-disjoint from  $M$ . Suppose first that  $e_M(V_2, W) = 2$ . Let  $e' \in E(M') \setminus \{e\}$  be arbitrary. Then  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup \{e, e'\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). Suppose instead that  $e_M(V_2, W) = e_M(V_1, W) = 1$ . Then  $\mathcal{P} := M \cup \{e\}$  satisfies (P1)–(P3). This completes the proof of Lemma 7.3 in all cases.  $\square$

## 8. THE PROOF OF THEOREM 1.1

We are now ready to prove Theorem 1.1. It is a consequence of Theorem 4.6 and Lemma 4.10 (both proved in [10]), as well as Lemmas 5.1, 6.1 and 7.1.

*Proof of Theorem 1.1.* Choose a non-decreasing function  $g : (0, 1) \rightarrow (0, 1)$  with  $g(x) \leq x$  for all  $x \in (0, 1)$  such that the requirements of Proposition 4.5 and Lemmas 4.10, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1 (each applied, where relevant, with  $1/32, 1/4$  playing the roles of  $\eta, \alpha$ ) are satisfied whenever  $n, \rho, \gamma, \nu, \tau$  satisfy

$$(8.1) \quad 1/n \leq g(\rho), g(\gamma); \quad \rho, \gamma \leq g(\nu); \quad \nu \leq g(\tau); \quad \tau \leq g(1/32).$$

Choose  $\tau, \tau'$  so that

$$0 \leq \tau' \leq \tau \leq g(1/32), 40^{-3} \quad \text{and} \quad \tau' \leq g(\tau).$$

Define a function  $g' : (0, 1) \rightarrow (0, 1)$  by  $g'(x) = (g(x))^3$ . Apply Theorem 4.6 with  $g', \tau', 1/20$  playing the roles of  $g, \tau, \varepsilon$  to obtain an integer  $n_0$ . Let  $G$  be a 3-connected  $D$ -regular graph on  $n \geq n_0$  vertices where  $D \geq n/4$ . We may assume that Theorem 4.6(ii) holds or we are done. Thus there exist  $\rho, \nu$  with  $1/n_0 \leq \rho \leq \nu \leq \tau', 1/n_0 \leq g'(\rho)$  and  $\rho \leq g'(\nu)$ ; and  $(k, \ell) \in \{(4, 0), (2, 1), (0, 2)\}$  such that  $G$  has a robust partition  $\mathcal{V}$  with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau', k, \ell$  (and thus also a robust partition with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, k, \ell$ ).

Let  $\gamma := \rho^{1/3}$ . Note that  $n, \rho, \gamma, \nu, \tau$  satisfy (8.1). Apply Lemmas 5.1, 6.1 in the cases when  $(k, \ell)$  equals  $(4, 0), (0, 2)$  respectively to obtain a  $\mathcal{V}$ -tour of  $G$  with parameter  $\gamma$ . Proposition 4.5 implies that  $\mathcal{V}$  is a weak robust partition with parameters  $\rho, \nu, \tau, 1/32, k, \ell$ . Then Lemma 4.10 implies that  $G$  contains a Hamilton cycle. Apply Lemma 7.1 in the case when  $(k, \ell) = (2, 1)$  to obtain a Hamilton cycle in  $G$ . This completes the proof of the theorem.  $\square$



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